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MAGAZINE

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VOLUME 1

FEBRUARY, 1950

NUMBER 2



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# CALLING ALL FANTASY FANS

**I**N THIS issue of A. MERRITT'S FANTASY and in those to follow we are going to give you the very best in fantastic fiction. In our December issue we told you about A. Merritt and his writings. This time we want to introduce three other very famous men of fantasy.

You are meeting the first one in this edition, George Challis. Just his pen names indicate the vast scope of his imagination and illusiveness. You have no doubt heard of Evan Evans, George O. Baxter, Dennis Lawton, Peter Ward, Max Brand, and of course George Challis. Don't be misled by these names. They all belong to Frederick Faust! And so do many others which we haven't mentioned. Although you will only see him here as a writer of Fantasy stories his stories cover adventure of almost every kind. He was one of the world's most prolific writers and was commonly known as the "king of pulp magazines." He wrote on an average of one full length novel every three weeks. Unfortunately he was killed in Italy just as the Allied offensive operations got under way. He had hoped to write about the G.I.'s under fire, taking one company throughout the Italian campaign. It is with great pleasure that we bring you one of his best "astonishing" stories, THE SMOKING LAND.

It takes bold men, men of action and adventure to bring you these spine-curdling experiences. And that's why we are going to insert a side-line tip to tell you about a recent movie that we just saw. It's the exciting new release of United Artists, "The Big Wheel." Here is the story of a racetrack where courage and skill are of prime importance for the racing men.

Mickey Rooney stars as Billy Coy, a brash mechanic who aspires to drive in the big races. Co-starring is Thomas Mitchell as Red Stanley, proprietor of an auto-racing garage, and Mary Hatcher (Louise Riley) a girl mechanic. Fire and death

hover on the racetrack curves as the cars roar down the final lap. It's thrilling!

Now let's look ahead for the excitement to be found in A. MERRITT'S FANTASY for April. There you will meet Jack Mann's THE NINTH LIFE. It's very different from George Challis' SMOKING LAND. It has the charm and intrigue of ancient Egypt—and it's cruelty too. You will meet Cleo Kefra—*fifty centuries old . . . no more than fifty centuries—yet alive with all the sweetness of youth, with beauty unmarked by time, inspiring and yielding to ecstasy beyond dreams.* Once, we know, she was involved in international intrigue—is that why she came to England to become engaged to wealthy Tony Briggs of the British Foreign Office or were there other reasons? Gregory Green becomes entangled in this mystery when, one afternoon, Inspector Tott pays an unofficial call. "There's nothing wrong with Miss Kefra," he says, "but—oh darn it, come see for yourself." You will meet her too. You will believe as did Gregory—the fantastic tale of her origin and her role in the world.

Our second story is entitled THE LITTLE DOLL DIED by Theodore Roscoe. Haiti is the setting for a Marine detachment which was sent down there in 1916 to quell a native uprising. In the midst of guerilla war arrived an absent-minded scientist who introduced himself as a naturalist, archeologist, paleontologist and so on. With him came his frilly blonde wife and a charmingly handsome Irishman, a past master of taxidermy. In a land kept dark by the massive forests people spoke only in whispers about zombies. Most Americans were slightly curious about Black Magic but they thought its hold on the natives due to their ignorance. Then one day a leatherneck, with his own eyes, saw a dead man rise.

The next issue of A. MERRITT'S FANTASY will be published March 3rd.

—The Editor



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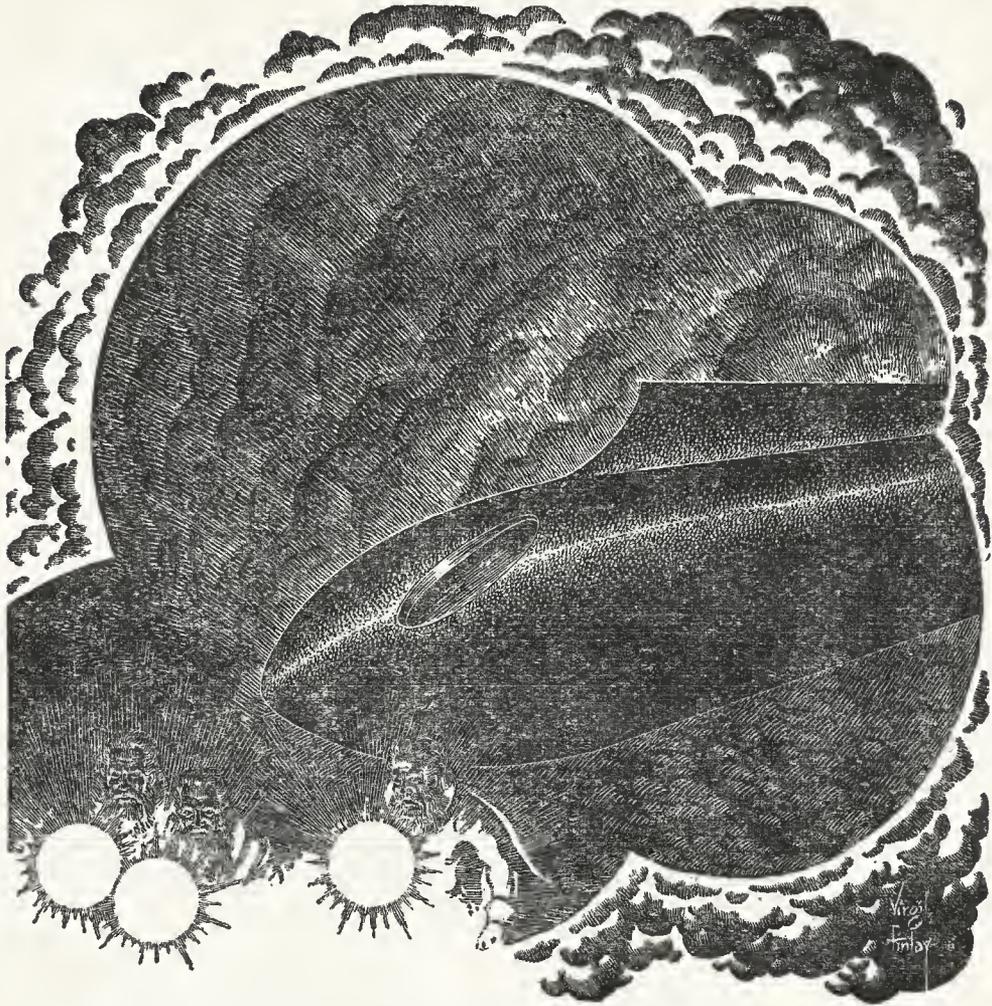
# THE SMOKING LAND

A CLASSIC NOVEL OF SUPER-SCIENCE AND  
AMAZING ADVENTURE

**By George Challis**



I saw sections of the steel wall  
being cut away in great sweeps.



*Spectacular adventure lured ranchman Smoky Bill on a weird, lone voyage to the world's periphery where reckless men waited to turn atomic science against the world.*

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## CHAPTER 1

### The Summons

**T**HERE are plenty of folks on the Bitterroot range, from Apache Springs to Bullhide Crossing, who claim that the Cassidys, man and boy, have been liars and scoundrels and cotton-wood-bait for three generations. Yes, and not without cause, as I am the first to

admit. So there's not any hurt feelings.

My own name is Cassidy—Smoky Bill, they call me mostly—and I never professed to be lily-pure. I have shot off my gun at moving targets and not all of them were coyotes. I have been a bit careless now and then about flipping my loop and dabbing my running iron. If I swore on a Bible, here and now, that I was Mahatma Gandhi or General Grant—well, it

wouldn't be the first time I've told a lie.

But no man alive can say that the Cassidys aren't good men to ride the river with. No one can claim that we ever lie down on a friend.

This by way of explanation, and to account for the state of my mind and being on this afternoon when a rider clattered up outside my shack on the hill and cut loose with a bull-bellow. . . .

There was sunset red on the far peaks and dusk was clotting at the edges of the sky. I had been dozing, and the first sound I heard was my name bawled out above the crunch of hoofs.

"Cassidy—" I heard him call. "It's Cleveland Darrell wants you, Cassidy...."

I stood in the doorway and watched him climb down from a tall roan. He was a little man with a fat and hairless face and glasses on his stubby nose. A stranger, I saw, so I transferred the gun behind my back from my fingers to my waistband. He came up to me like a strutting banty rooster.

"Mr. William Cassidy?" I gave him a nod. "I am Dr. Herbert Franklin," he said. "Perhaps you have heard of me. I come to you, sir, in behalf of Cleveland Darrell."

I stood aside to let him in. "What's wrong with Cleve?" I asked.

"Nothing," said he, "but something is apt to be wrong with him unless I can find a man willing to call himself Darrell's friend. Are you the man?"

"Sit down on that chair, there, doctor," I said, "and tell me all about it. If Cleve Darrell's in a jam, then I'm your huckleberry. So speak up, man."

He sat, and his bright eyes watched me. In the meantime I was reaching back into my memory of newspapers, which have made the biggest part of the reading I have done in my life, and the name of Dr. Herbert Franklin began to seem more and more familiar. In his face I recognized the pictures I had seen.

"Dr. Franklin!" I said. "Aren't you the scientist who invented the ray that knocks the chin whiskers off of atoms and scrambles molecules all over the lot?"

He pursed up his lips. "Mr. Cassidy," said he, "I may be remembered, a bit in the future, as the man who started the experiments which a much more talented

investigator carried on. I'm referring, naturally, to our distinguished friend, Dr. Cleveland Darrell."

I may have smiled a little. It was rather a shock to hear old Cleve Darrell referred to in the rather heavy manner of an after-dinner speaker as a "distinguished mutual friend," I had known Cleve well enough in the old days at district school to black his distinguished eye while he was giving me an undistinguished nosebleed. Of course I knew that he had become important in the meantime, but do what we will, we cannot be too serious about the newspaper fame of fellows we have ducked in the old swimming hole.

I said that I would like to know what was happening that made Cleve seem to be in danger.

SAID the famous Dr. Franklin, "Do you know what Dr. Darrell is doing at the present time?"

"Playing pinochle about this hour, I should say," said I, "unless he's changed his habits a good deal."

Dr. Franklin cleared his throat. "I mean to say, do you know what his scientific occupation is?"

"It's something about electricity," said I. "That's all I know. Something hard to get at, and hard to understand."

"To put it shortly," said Dr. Franklin, "the goal of many men for a long time has been to release untold stores of power by liberating the chained-up energy of the atom. This means, in a word, the dissolution of matter. At least, we have no other term for it at the present time, and the idea of Cleveland Darrell is the production of a ray, whose impact upon a certain gas at a certain temperature . . . but perhaps I can put it mathematically more simply still."

"You can, Dr. Franklin," said I. "You can, something tells me that you can. I knew when I laid eyes on you that you were a mathematician, or something like that. All my life I've admired mathematicians. I've admired, and revered them, but they give me the creeps."

I thought I had better explain this because I didn't want to hurt his feelings, so I said, "It's just that people are that way, or they aren't. The same with snakes and spiders. I've seen a man pick up a

spider by the legs and stroke the fur of its back. That's all right. It's quite all right if you happen to be fond of spiders. But I prefer snakes. Spiders and mathematics give me the creeps."

"Ah, yes, I understand," said the doctor.

But I could see that he didn't. In fact, he went right on. "I can make it perfectly simple, with a diagram and a few elementary equations—"

"Don't do it, doctor," said I. "I know that you could make it simple, but it's no good. Just the way a fellow who has taken the Keeley Cure can detect alcohol, no matter how it's mixed up and disguised, in just the same way I can spot mathematics miles away, wearing a mask and a Spanish sash. It may promise a good time. It may look a good tie. But I spot it at once and get indigestion, and a swimming darkness before the eyes. I've been to nerve specialists and psychoanalysts, but they can't keep me from dreaming about algebra all night. Even fractions I don't like. I don't like them, don't use them, and I hate to talk about them. And a decimal point can spoil a whole day for me."

"Ah?" said the doctor. "In your case perhaps there has been a stoppage of the naturally developing—however, let that go. The difficulty is that I feel that I must give you an impression of the vast importance of Cleveland Darrell's work, and without the aid of mathematics, it is a subject which I fear can only be approached incompletely and indirectly."

"Be as incomplete as you like, doctor," said I. "As for indirectness, I'm a regular buzzard—I always fly in circles. You say that Cleve is doing some great work. I take your word for it. He's making a ray that will knock the spots out of every ray that ever rayed before. I gather that this ray will turn loose a lot of horsepower, which I understand, and equations, which I don't. So let's call it a drawn battle. Cleve is a great man and he's doing a great work. I take everything about it for granted. Now let's whittle the idea down to my own size and tell me what I can do to help."

"I take it," said Franklin, "that you're an old friend of Dr. Darrell's?"

"The best friend I ever had," said I.

Beyond the windows the dusk was creeping over the range. Lights were winking in the big ranch house below us.

"Cleve Darrell made all that possible," I told the little doctor. "I'd be just another saddle tramp if it wasn't for Cleve." I grinned, remembering. "Tell you just how good a friend Cleve was. He used to lick me two times out of three, but before he went away to college, he taught me the secret. It wasn't much—just a simple little thing—but oh, the difference to me! It was only a little uppercut that started out like an apology and wound up like the crack of a whip. The loaded end, if you understand."

THE doctor gave an embarrassed laugh, such as a man uses when he's out of his depth and turns to wade for dry land.

"As a matter of fact," said he, "there are certain obliquities in your speech that I don't quite follow. Perhaps a little more familiarity—"

"No," said I, "study never would do it for you, Doctor Franklin. You could spend your life studying the lingo and never be clear in the use of it. It's just one of those things that we were talking about—snakes or spiders. And I gather that you're not at home with snakes."

"No," said he, "it's a matter into which I never have gone very deeply. I once wrote a little article on ophidians which—"

"Well," said I, turning a quick corner, "That's all right too. But let's get back to Cleve. What can I do for him?"

"You can protect him," said Franklin.

I was glad to get the talk down to short sentences like that. "Protect him from what?"

"From danger. I gather that you're a man of your hands—even with guns?"

"I have *used* my hands, doctor," said I. "Though I've seen times when I would have preferred to have a club. As for guns—well, I'm a lot more at home with them than I am with theorems and equations."

"Quite so," says he.

"But who in the world could have it in for old Cleve?" said I. "He was always the salt, and as quiet as a mouse until somebody picked on him. Then he could be thorny enough. Has he used his uppercut on somebody who refuses to forget?"

"Uppercut?" said the doctor. "Er—as a matter of fact, not only individuals—and men of great power, too—but whole nations are interested in either stealing the results of Dr. Darrell's experiments, or else destroying him before they are completed."

"Destroying him?" said I.

"Yes."

"Murder Darrell?"

"Yes."

"But," I protested, "nations—great modern nations don't go all out to kill an individual even if he has found a new kind of gunpowder, or a way to fly to the moon."

I could almost *hear* the doctor shake his head. "This case is a new one," said he. "And the matter is of such vast importance that even international morals and law will be shaken to their foundations! That is to say, if the experiments succeed, and in the meantime, we have Cleveland Darrell, a man who absolutely refuses to take the slightest precautions. His own heart is so high and his spirit so noble that he declines to attribute meaner motives to others. In short, he imperils his life—which is another way of saying that he imperils the future of civilization—by refusing to take the slightest precaution. And that is why I have come to you. I have heard him refer to you affectionately, and very often. I believe that since he opened his laboratory at silver Dam he has used his hours of recreation to come hunting with you on your property."

"Yes, he's done that," said I.

"And I gather from what he says," went on Dr. Franklin, "that you are a friend who could be depended upon. Otherwise, I confess that I don't know what to do or where to turn. If I hire armed men, they will probably be corrupted by the enormous sums of money which our enemies are prepared to use, and in the most unscrupulous ways."

This began to look interesting.

"Concerning your interrupted work," said the doctor, "I could promise you on behalf of the laboratory a fee sufficiently handsome to cover, I believe—"

"Fee?" said I. "No, Dr. Franklin. I have a foreman and ranch hands down below who run my place much better with-

out me. That's why I have my headquarters up here. Getting me off the property means money in my pocket in the long run. I'll be happy to stay around and look after Cleve Darrell as much as I can."

The doctor was delighted. He said he had been led to suspect that I was exactly this sort of a splendid fellow, and he passed out a lot more of the same sort of encouragement. However, I let that go over my shoulder.

"When do you want me on the job?" said I. "Tomorrow morning?"

"Tomorrow morning?" said he, with a sort of horror in his voice. "Mr. Cassidy, if you can possibly manage it, it would be a godsend to have you with us to help us through this very night!"

I must admit that my temperature lowered pretty fast, at that. But I said that I would come, and went down to saddle my horse.

## CHAPTER 2

### The Weeping Giant

SCIENTISTS, I've discovered, don't overstate. Certainly Dr. Franklin did not. I went over to the great dam and the laboratory which used some of the power that whirred out of the dynamos, fairly determined that I would be able to steer Cleve Darrell through that one night, at least; but I failed. My comfort is that I don't think any other one man would have succeeded.

However, I shall try to tell the details of that dizzy affair one by one. On the way over, of course I pumped Dr. Franklin as thoroughly dry as I could. I said, "There're a good many men employed about the works and in the factory, I suppose?"

"About two hundred," he nodded.

"Do you suspect that some of those men are on the wrong side?" said I.

"Yes, they are all on the wrong side, I suspect," said the doctor.

"You suspect everybody?"

"Yes, everybody."

"There must be some hardy, honest old night watchman," said I. "Come, now, Dr. Franklin. Don't tell me that every soul in two hundred could be corrupted this way!"

The doctor did not answer me at once, but bumped along on top of his horse with his elbows flopping up and down. All I can say of his riding is that it was just about what one would expect from a mathematician. Finally he said:

"Mr. Cassidy, I wish to tell you something."

"Go right ahead," said I. "As long as there isn't an X plus Y squared in what you say, I'll try to follow you. By the way, nearly everyone about here, including Darrell, calls me Smoky. That will shorten some of the things you need to say."

He thanked me, but he wouldn't use the nickname. He said, continuing, "I believe you feel that I have a friendly attitude towards Darrell?"

"Yes. I'm not able to find any other reason that could have brought you on this ride tonight. Something tells me that you're not very fond of riding."

"Ah, and how could you have guessed that?" said he.

"I don't know," said I. "I just had the idea."

"One may always admire," said the doctor, "the insight which every man is apt to show within his own province. But if you'll take it for granted that I am fond of Darrell, both as a man and because of my great admiration of him as a scientist—and if you will realize that my private fortune, in addition, has been sufficient for every need I have had in my life, then—"

He paused, and I was still as a mouse. I realized that Dr. Franklin was telling me things which ordinarily I should never have heard him say even if I eavesdropped.

He went on with a good deal of effort. "In spite of all these things, and others which bind me to act as a man of integrity, Mr. Cassidy—in spite, I say, of so many bonds, even I have been tempted!"

His voice dropped and was little more than a hoarse whisper. And I could guess, then, with half a mind, that the soul of the doctor was a great deal taller than his inches.

I pondered this thing bit by bit. "Was it hard cash that was offered, Dr. Franklin?" I finally asked.

He cleared his throat, and made another

difficult pause before he answered. "The money was only a part of the offer. The other part—if you don't mind, it's a thing about which I cannot very well speak."

Of course I could not press him. But I took to wondering what all-powerful devils must be after poor Darrell when they could almost buy the soul of a gentleman like Franklin, a famous man, a wealthy man, a man of honor!

WHAT would be my price, for instance? If they could budge Dr. Franklin, they certainly could budge me. And I wondered, with sweat on my face, what my upper limit would be, and what besides coin they would throw into the scales?

Things like that make long miles.

But finally we climbed the rise and saw from the divide that tarnished sheen of the water behind the dam, and the glittering of the lights that swarmed along the left side of it. Lights of a town, when one rides toward them, always seem to shift and stir about like a busy swarm of bees, and all that sense of movement was to me, on this night, a preparation of trouble to come.

We went down the slope beyond, and then up, climbing steadily, with very few words spoken, until we got to the village, where the houses of employees were stretched along regular streets, with a lot of well-watered green about them, not to be seen, but breathing out through the darkness. And I could hear the whirring of lawn sprinklers, now and then, and the thin whisper as the spray of it cut the air.

It was a pleasant moment, on the whole, but like the flowers of a funeral, all of this beauty only served to depress me, now. The quiet was the expectant hush before the fight begins.

We put up our horses in the company stables, and then went to the main building where the laboratories had been established. They had about an acre of rooms of one sort or another, all at the disposal of Dr. Cleveland Darrell, and they supplied him with money for his experiments, and besides that, he had all the immense flow of water power that the dam controlled to use for his experiments. In return, he did a nit of work for them in his odd moments. I wondered how they

could afford to do it, and asked Dr. Franklin if it were simply because they were so tremendously interested in his experiments.

"The truth is," he said, "that the heads of this firm are not quite intelligent enough to appreciate the direction which his experiments are taking. They don't know how much he has in hand. But it isn't either pity or charity that makes them keep up such a big plant for Cleveland Darrell. No, he saves them in hard cash something like two or three hundred thousand dollars a year, and in addition, he's put some commercial inventions in their hands that ought to put them just about a whole century ahead of the rest of the world."

While the doctor was speaking, I took up his statements one by one and used them as measuring rods with which to estimate the mental size of Cleve Darrell, and he kept growing and growing against the horizon of my imagination until he pretty well stood up among the stars.

Of course I had known for years that he was important. But I had not suspected that he was a giant. When he was with me, he talked fishing and hunting, and such stuff, and he could be very good company both before dinner and after. But this was different. I was to see him on his own camping grounds!

We saw him very quickly.

We got up into a narrow little box of a sitting room, with seventeen kinds of odors in it, all of them bad, and a tired-looking boy took our names in, and a tired-looking little man with a week's beard on his face came out and snapped at us, and said that we would have to wait.

We asked him how long we would have to wait and I understood him to say, as he turned his back on us and went away with the white skirts of his apron flapping behind him, that he didn't know how long we would have to wait, and that he didn't give a damn.

I looked at Dr. Franklin, and the doctor smiled a little. "People who work around Cleveland Darrell," said he, "are apt to become a little tense—if they have wits enough to understand what he's doing."

We went over and stood at the window that looked down upon the galley; and there we waited for another half hour, I

think. And then a red streak blinded me. No, it was more golden than red. It leaped, I think, from farther down the side of the building, and it landed somewhere on the face of the opposite cliff.

YES, we could see the spot where it landed. There was a strange howling, roaring sound like thunder and a sick cat making music together. And I saw a glowing spot form on the side of the cliff and grow rapidly. While from the nether rim of that circle, red-golden dripping flowed down the face of the cliff, and where they reached precipitous falls and jumped through the air, they struck again on the rock below with showering of living sparks. The whole cliff was lighted up. It was the weirdest thing that I'd ever seen.

As for Dr. Franklin, I thought that he'd throw himself out the window, he climbed so far and hung so over the ground. And there was a groaning in his throat.

Now the great circle of light that had been growing and growing up to this moment, disappeared as suddenly as it had commenced. And Franklin dropped back into the room, and barely managed to stagger to a chair.

He sank into it, and I, turning about, pretty well flabbergasted, was in time to see a tall figure with long, loose white arms, and a long white gown that flowed to the ground, and—a glass face!

This form stood by the door, fumbling at its head, and presently the glass mask came away and showed me Darrell.

Yes, it was the same fellow, but he had such a look on his face as I never had seen before. Dr. Franklin had said that the men who worked with young Darrell were apt to get a little tense. If so, it was a trouble that they could easily have caught from their boss. The color was out of his face, and the eyes flitted far back under his brows. He looked as though he hadn't slept for a month; but he looked, too, as if he could keep on working for another month. Perhaps that will give you my feeling about how he had been burning himself up, and how much there still remained to burn in him!

He gave us a wave of the hand for a greeting. He didn't have time for us yet.

A couple of poor devils were carried out through the door. They had fainted, and now they were rushed over to the windows and flattened out on the floor. Water was thrown in their faces. Brandy was poured down their throats.

Darrell was busy over them; his motions were quick and crisp, but heavy with strain.

The little fellow with the beard—the snapping turtle of a half hour before—was one of them; and I was rather glad of it. The other was a big six-foot-something whale of a man with a jaw like a crag. Just now as he came to he sat up, stood up—and broke out in heavy sobbing, like a baby.

It gave me cold chills to see him, but the dozens or so aproned laboratory workers—they looked more like surgeons' assistants—seemed to feel no shame for him, only understanding and sympathy. They helped him out of the room.

The little man of the beard got up next, and he walked across the room like a sleepwalker until suddenly he threw a hand up before his eyes, and winced a

little, sideward, and fell sprawling on the floor again. Well, it's an odd thing to say, but I'm convinced that what knocked him flat this time was simply the eyes of Darrell, which suddenly had met his!

### CHAPTER 3

#### The Big Door

**M**IND you, I don't think that there was any malice in Darrell's look. He picked up the little bearded man with the ease one would expect from a fellow of his strength of arm and back, and handed him over to a pair of white-aproned assistants who carried him from the room. No, there was no question of personal malice. It was simply that when the little bearded man had looked at Darrell, he saw Darrell in connection with something that literally kicked the feet out from under him.

Darrell got the rest of his staff out of the room, and it seemed to me that they went like dumb cattle, looking over their shoulders at him as though they expected him to change into a grizzly, or some-



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thing worse. What looks of apprehension!

When we were alone, Dr. Franklin shouted, "Darrell, you've done it!"

But Cleve raised a hand at him, partly, at least, in warning. Then he came over and shook hands with me.

"I had to sweep the rest of 'em out-of-the room," he said. "That's why I didn't pay any attention to you at first, Smoky. Is anything wrong? What's brought you over here in the middle of the night?"

"Because," said I, "I've been hearing that the nights here are a lot too long for the nerves of some of the people at the laboratory. And I've seen enough to make it clear, all right. What did you do that turned a couple of hardboiled humans into jelly, Cleve?"

He considered me with his deep, bright eye in a way I had known in him since childhood.

"It's a hard thing to talk about," he said, very slowly. "I don't want to talk about it, either. I'll only say that both of those fellows have been working closely with me for months. They believed in me. They believed in what I was going to do. But the very thing we believe in is what may try us the most."

"I know," said I, translating down to my own level. "I never care what happens when a pair of teams go into the field, even if they're big leaguers, but when the Wyoming Wasps trot out, my heart bumps right up through the brain pan, and I get all addled. But what under heaven was that blasted loose from the side of this building?"

He gave me a faint smile, and then he turned to Dr. Franklin. "Did you see, Franklin?"

Herbert Franklin sat shaking in a chair in a corner of the room, his head bowed, his hands gripped hard on the arms of the chair. He did not look up now, but simply nodded his head, saying, "I saw!"

A wave of stifling hot air rolled through the windows and soaked through the room. There was an odd smell to it; it choked me, and set Franklin to coughing. But he jumped up and pointed to the outer night, not saying a word but keeping his eyes fixed upon Darrell.

Said Darrell, "That's it. I don't know what the temperature was, exactly. Not exactly. But I prophesy that the trees in

the canyon will be dead in the morning."

Franklin put a hand before his eyes. "What else will be dead?" said he, huskily. "Not tomorrow, but afterward. It's something that no man should ever have attempted."

"If scoundrels have the say of it, no," said Darrell. "But it had to come sooner or later.

He gave his attention to me, again, but not all of it. No, most of it was still at work on something else. I knew he was contemplating what he'd done that night.

"You've come over here as a nerve specialist," said he. "What's your medicine, doctor?"

"Pills," said I.

"What sort of pills?"

"Mostly lead," I answered.

He frowned at me, and I pulled out my old Colt. "Pills that just fit this throat," said I.

"Put that up," said he, rather angrily. "Are you gunning for somebody? What's the matter with you, Smoky?"

"NOTHING'S the matter with me," said I. "But I gather that there's something apt to be the matter with you before long."

He looked at Franklin, frowning. "This is your work, I know. I'm sorry, now, that I ever told you about this wild scoundrel. Bill, you get out of here and go back home."

"You go to the devil," said I. "I've already done a day's riding, and I need rest. I'll stay here till the morning."

"All right. Only that long," said he. "Mind you—promise me that you won't take longer than that from your work."

"My work's all right," said I.

He shrugged. "You should not have bothered him, Franklin, but as long as he's here, I'm damned glad to have him."

"Raising a little crop of nerves, Cleve?" I said.

He nodded.

"Well, then," said I, "I'll sleep across your threshold and be your faithful Friday. Where do you put up tonight?"

"I put up in the laboratory," said he.

"Hold on," said I. "You've done enough for tonight. You've scared me to death, socked the cliff on the point of the chin, and killed all the trees in the canyon.

Isn't that enough? For one night, at least?"

A tremor went through him, and the sight of it made me shake, too, because whatever else he was, Cleve was not the jittery sort. Nerves of iron he had, I remembered. Once.

"Franklin and you, Smoky," he said, "if I'm right, what I've done so far to-night is only the first step. What follows is so much more important that I can't mention it in the same breath!"

"What on earth can it be?" asked Dr. Franklin, and I was comforted to see that even his mathematical brain found Cleve foundering on logarithms in a deep sea.

"I can't tell you, Franklin," said Darrell. "In a sense, I daresay that it's *not* on earth. But I can't tell you. There are no words to fit the idea. Mind you, it's only a dream. I have to go about the resolution of it or the scattering of it all by myself. Not a soul can be with me. And that's why I say I'm glad to have someone to watch the door for me."

This atmosphere was growing so spooky that I would have called it a practical joke in any other place, but jokes don't breed very fast around a scientific laboratory. So I simply said, "Well, show me the door."

He took the pair of us at once, and the door he brought us to *was* a door. It was ten feet high and nearly as broad. It was opened by a purring machine that gave me the willies, and I rapped it on both sides with my knuckles. It was six inches, at least, of tool-proof steel—enough to break the heart of any egg; and beyond it there was a very long, narrow room, with heavily shaded electric lamps hanging from the ceiling at the farther end and throwing down brilliant funnels of light.

There was the usual laboratory litter of glass test tubes and such stuff ranged on the long sink affair under the lights, and big glass vases along shelves, filled with powders or liquids bright and gray enough, some of them, to stand beside the candy containers in a country store. Filling most of the rest of the space were several big iron cases that might have contained dynamos, ugly round heads they were that might have fitted monstrous bodies to scare grown men with the light of

midday. The rest didn't look menacing.

Said Darrell—and I hope you will take what he said to heart, because it has a bearing on what follows—"This is the place where I spend the rest of the night. Before morning, I shall either be dead or else life—"

He stopped. I heard a strangling cry behind me and looked around—my gun in my hand.

It was only Dr. Franklin. He was gripping his throat with both hands as though he were trying to strangle himself and making a pretty good job of it. His face looked like the face of a drowning man.

"NOT that, Darrell!" said he. "Not that—in mercy's name."

"Yes," said Darrell, white and grimmer than ever. "In mercy's name—in the name of mankind—I have to make my try before morning. Smoky, I want you to watch that door. I've shown you the key that opens it. And no one must turn that key. You understand?"

"I understand," said I. "What if some callers drop in through another door, eh?"

"There's no other door," said he. "I've been planning for this night for three long years. This room was specially built. Blasted, I should say—blasted out of the naked rock."

"What about the windows?" said I.

"Look for yourself," said he.

I looked, and one look was enough. Far away below me was the dull sheen of water. I wanted to drop something and count the long seconds before it splashed.

"I'm satisfied," said I, turning back. "No one is to approach the door, eh?"

"No one," said he.

"And if somebody insists?"

"Warn 'em solemnly, twice, three times if you can. And then—"

"Well?" said I, beginning to feel really serious.

"Well," said he, "you have a gun, and not many people shoot straighter than you do, Smoky."

"You mean me to shoot 'em down?" said I.

"Damnation," said Darrell, through his teeth. "D'you understand the English language?"

It didn't offend me. No, it simply scared me to see that those steel nerves of his had been warped so taut and filed so thin. I said nothing in reply. He meant killing when he said it and I did not doubt that he had sufficient justification. Though I must say that I had a bright picture of Smoky Cassidy mounted on a gallows' scaffold with a rope around his neck and someone asking him if he had any last statement to make before leaving this sad world.

Darrell took us outside again. "You know where the key is," he said. "If so many men come that you can't handle them, just press this button—this one here. That will give me sufficient warning, and if they open the door after that—" He set his jaws, I saw the glint of his teeth. "They'll never be seen again between earth and heaven, Smoky!" said he.

By thunder, he meant it, too—plain annihilation!

Then, with a mere gesture to us, he went inside the room! I heard the door mechanism purr; and Darrell was closed away from us by half a foot of solid tool-proof steel.

## CHAPTER 4

### When the Mountain Went

I HAD a few moments to chat with Dr. Franklin after that, but I couldn't get much out of him, for he was dazed, and he still was wearing a remnant of that horrible, drowned look that I had seen on his face before.

I asked him if he had any idea what Darrell meant, and he said that he had, but that he could not talk about it.

"Why not?" said I.

His answer was sufficiently wild to make my head buzz. He shook a hand over his head, and with a trembling forefinger he pointed to the ceiling—but I knew he didn't mean to show me the ceiling. It was beyond it—the heavens—that he meant.

"Because," said Dr. Franklin, "it would be blasphemy to say even the names of rash fools who attempt to do what should lie only in the hand of God Almighty!"

And he turned on his heel and left me.

I stared after the door through which he passed for a considerable time, and then I looked around me for some way to kill time.

The room I was in was by way of being a waiting room; a number of magazines were lying on the center table. I cheered up when I spotted on one side of it a deep leather chair. I sank down into the chair and passed my hands over the magazines. In all that number there would have to be at least one detective story, and detective stories are my special meat. A dead body in the first chapter is my taste, and then suspicion all around, with the smart detective coming in when things look blackest for the innocent.

Personally, I think that it's hard to beat one of those family murders, in which the murder taint involves father, mother, brother James and sister Mary, to say nothing of the invalid old aunt. A story like that thickens the blood; I've gone to sleep with my light on, after reading one of those yarns.

So I passed my hand eagerly over the magazines, my mouth set for just the particular taste I had in mind.

But I was beaten from the start. Those magazines were not human. They were filled with reports of learned societies, and the only pictures they contained were of machines and gadgets twisted enough to make an octopus look as simple as a snail. I looked through them; one glance at any of them was enough. Then I slumped back into my chair and fell into the deep ways of disconnected, nervous thinking.

The floor of the room was trembling—and my brain was trembling, too—with a powerful, subdued humming that came from beyond the thick steel door. I linked my thoughts with that sense and feeling of electric might at work, and I began to wonder if the time might come when the machine was the man—and the man merely an inferior machine . . .

The click of the door yanked me out of it, and I saw Dr. Franklin come hurrying back, in his dressing gown, his feet whispering over the floor in slippers.

He waved to me. "I left my glasses in there, like an idiot," said he.

He went on towards the door.

"You're not going in, are you?" said I.

"Not going in?" exclaimed the doctor.

He paused on his way across the floor and stared at me. Then he laughed.

"Oh, I see," said he. "You're being the good watchdog, eh? Well, that's all right, but don't bother me about it. Darrell is used to having me slip in and out at all times of day and night."

He went on to the door, and I sat back in my chair, relieved, but when I saw him reaching his hand towards the opening key, I shouted out, suddenly—a twinge of suspicion pushing my voice out.

Dr. Franklin jerked around. He was a pale but definite green, and the drowned look was on his face again. I covered him with my Colt, and I don't mind saying that the gun shook. How would you like to have your favorite dog jump for your throat, for instance?

Well, he stood there plastered against the wall, his hands pressed out flat against it beside him, while I got up and walked over to him. He did not shrink away, but merely watched me, blinking rapidly, gagged with horror.

**S**OMEHOW I knew exactly where to find it. I simply dipped a hand into his right dressing-gown pocket and fished out the thing. It was one of those bulldog affairs, short-nosed, but loaded with full-sized forty-five caliber slugs. I'd rather be hit by the regular bullet from the regular gun. A Colt smashed the pellet clear through you. The dirty bulldog revolver is too apt to just curl its slug around a bone and leave it there somewhere inside you.

I put the gun in my own pocket. I could hardly look at the doctor. I just watched his feet on the floor as he went back towards the outer door, and a very wavering line they followed, you may be sure! Not until the door slammed did I really look up.

Then I got across to my chair and slid into it, dizzy, and cold, and thoroughly sick. It had been shocking enough to hear Franklin admit, on the ride over, that he nearly had been bought up by the people "outside." I had thought that, and still think it, the most heroically honest confession I have ever heard. But now the

same man, having been tempted, having confessed, had returned to the poison.

Oh, any other man, but not that little, large-brained mathematical giant, with his international reputation, and all. But I had seen with my own eyes. I could still finger in my pocket the gun with which he had walked to the forbidden door ready to shoot Cleve Darrell dead!

What did he intend to do afterward? How did he intend to get back past my long-barreled, professional Colt?

It simply meant that the price had been so frightfully high that he was prepared to commit the crime, and die for it the next second.

I was glad he was out of it, poor Dr. Franklin. No, I didn't despise him, or feel any particular loathing. I simply thanked God that whatever price had been offered to him had not been used to tempt me.

Would some grave professor with the eye of a priest and a pocketful of wisdom and diamonds, come to buy me off from in front of that door?

I told myself that no matter who stepped inside the waiting room, I would give him five seconds to step out again before I started shooting. It would be a quick count, too.

But nothing of the sort happened. Perhaps they read my brutish mind from a distance, or perhaps the look of poor Franklin's green face as he went out was enough to settle their minds about Smoky Cassidy. At any rate, I was allowed to sit through long, cold hours, while the moon rose, and the haze of it met the electric light that streamed out the window.

I wanted very much to lean out that window and drag in a few breaths of honest, Rocky Mountain, unscientific air, but all through those nightmare hours I did not dare to budge my eyes from the outer door of the waiting room.

But nothing came through it. No, the disaster came from the other direction, behind the thick steel of the door that guarded poor Cleve Darrell.

A thousand times I have tried to order and solidify my memory of the instant. It seems to me to have lasted a full minute, though I know that it must have been only a fraction of a second; but it was the

hideous newness of the thing that lengthened the time. The best I can do is to ask you to try to conceive a noise that was a force, and a force that was also a light. For I heard a sound, and I felt a force crushing me as deep water crushes the body, and I knew that something ripped across my eyes, or the eye of my mind, like the golden-crimson lightning that had streamed over the valley and struck the face of the opposite cliff.

Then unconsciousness hit me like a hammer-stroke, and I was blind and deaf. All at once, all my senses seemed to be smothered. . . .

I came to with cold water being thrown on my face, and far away voices that came quickly nearer to me, saying that I couldn't be alive, and that it was impossible. And then another voice, grave and calm, saying that I had stood in a node of the explosion.

If you know what a node of an explosion is, you are wiser than I was. I heard, afterward, that sound travels in waves. And I had stood in the ebb of one of those roaring waves. Believe it if you please. I try to, but I can't. I mean to say, I've seen too many explosions, and handled too much dynamite to understand the wave theory at all!

Some theory had to be dragged in, however. I realized that when I went to look at what had been Darrell's laboratory. All that was left of it was the steel outer wall, and the steel door in the center of it. Both wall and door were in waves—good, deep waves, too. It looked like a sheet of rubber, or a putty model.

As for the solid rock on which the rest of the room had been built, it was washed away. There is no other word. It was clean gone, and the raw, dripping bowels of the mountain were in plain view.

It was three days after the explosion before they let me go back to the spot, and after I had seen it, I wished that I had stayed away for three weeks—or forever.

I asked how many tons of nitroglycerine must have been used to blow the shoulder and the chest off a mountain, and the wiseacres shook their heads. Nitroglycerine, I gathered, was child's play compared with what had popped there inside the long work room of Cleveland Darrell. And not a one of the wise men had

a grown-up thought as to what the explosive force *could* have been. Or could guess at it.

I saw Dr. Franklin, and asked him.

Oh, yes, we were on speaking terms again. He looked frightened and sick enough when I looked him up, but I said, straight from the heart:

"Franklin, whatever was in your mind earlier that night, and whatever devils got at you, I think you were through for the evening when you left me. I don't think you had anything to do with the hell-fire that broke later on. So please tell me what you think could have happened?"

He got hold of my arm with his shaking hand and thanked me for believing in him, and he told me in a dying voice that if he could dream of who the scoundrels were who had done the thing, or what means they had used, he would be the first to go to the powers of the law and accuse them. But he told me, in a dreadful whisper, that he thought the engines of Cleve Darrell's own construction must have been turned against him. By his tone, I guessed that he attributed the disaster to some superhuman agency.

But as for Cleveland Darrell, no one asked where he might be. Such a question seemed foolish. They simply built him a monument on top of the remainder of the mountain, and there you may see it to this day.

## CHAPTER 5

### A Piece of Wood

**B**UT while the world was forgetting Cleve Darrell, I was remembering him. Old friends die hard in my mind, and I never could forget that I had been placed on guard, that night of nights, and that the accident had happened while I was on the job—that I hadn't been able to keep it from happening.

Not that I really thought an outside hand had turned the trick. For Darrell himself, as you remember, had plainly stated that before morning he would either be dead or else—hell, something unfinished that had to do with life was in his mind, it appeared, when he ended his sentence. So it appeared plain that his experiment could easily end, in his own

expectation, with disaster embracing his death. And that was what I really thought had happened.

But one's real thought, and one's sneaking inward suspicion may be quite different, and the suspicion which sometimes nudged me and waked me in the middle of the night was that Darrell had been done away with by murderers.

Nevertheless, I went on with my work, while my ranch prospered hand over fist. Then, at the end of six months came the mild newspaper sensation of the piece of wood that was picked up in the mountains of British Columbia by a tourist. No real prospector or old-timer would have paid any attention to it, but tourists are always opening their eyes and finding things out that afterward astonish the natives. For there were odd things about that piece of wood.

In the first place, drawn on it with a sharp point, were certain words, which said:

*Bound north of Alaska for the Smoking Land and*

The writing stopped, there, at the end of the piece of wood, as though more words had followed when the stick was whole.

But the writing was not what had caught the attention of the wise men; it was not the writing that lodged that piece of wood in a special glass case at the Smithsonian. No, it was the nature of the wood itself, because it turned out not to be wood at all!

It looked like wood, and it had the grain of wood, and about the same specific

gravity. But it was tougher than steel, and almost as hard as corundum. In fact, the wise men decided that the writing on it must have been scratched by a diamond point!

It was, it appeared, wood impregnated with some mysterious substance, hitherto never discovered upon this planet. That takes the breath, doesn't it?

No, it was not petrified pitch, or anything else that the scientists knew about. It was simply wood into which something else had been injected. The wise men rubbed off little fractions of that singular bit of pseudo-wood and put the particles in their test tubes, and incanted long theories about atoms with electrons added, or subtracted, or some such rot, or the interstices of space being filled with—well, I don't know what. You'll find all the theories in the newspapers and the magazines of the time; and it was in one of those magazines that I found the thing which blasted me free from the dude ranch and started me north.

It was simply a good, clear picture of the strange piece of wood, showing both sides; but the face that interested me was that which bore the writing. For, when I looked at it, something jumped in my brain, like a jack rabbit in the middle of a desert, and the idea kept running and running in circles around me, until suddenly it came home to me with a bang.

That writing belonged to Cleveland Darrell!

NO, NOT to his grownup hand, but to the sort of scratching that he used to make in his copybooks when we were youngsters together, and when I used to

## BAND LEADER SWITCHES TO BLEND LEADER

AMARILLO, Texas—Billy F. Briggs, Amarillo band leader, has switched to Calvert Reserve. "Lighter, smoother, milder," he says. "Calvert is tops for moderate drinking."



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look over his shoulder and be secretly proud of my steadier writing.

The thing took such a hold on me that I finally got hold of a handwriting expert, and showed him the photograph, and asked him to compare it with a specimen of Cleve's mature hand from a letter to me. And then I told him my memory of Darrell's schoolboy writing.

The expert was a kind man, and a tolerant man, and he considered my idea very carefully and I guess honestly. But afterward, he told me that a prepossession had got hold of me; that it wasn't strange, because of my terrible experience in Darrell's laboratory. But, he said, prepossessions ought to be guarded against because they were apt to turn into obsessions, and he advised me to take a long rest . . .

He clearly thought I was a little off in the head because of my belief that I recognized Darrell's hand in the scratchings upon the piece of wood found in British Columbia. For one thing, had Darrell ever been in British Columbia?

That was a reasonable question. And it should have knocked my crazy theory flatter than flat. But it didn't. I couldn't think of anything else. It got so that it came between me and everything I did or was or could be.

Finally, I decided to give way to it utterly.

Meantime, I had been asking everyone I knew about a "smoking land" lying to the north of Alaska. But no one had ever heard of such a thing, although I talked to a good number of goldrush veterans, and to others who had mushed from one end of Alaska to the other. I got hold of books, too, and after someone told me that such a term might occur in some of the Esquimaux folk tales, I dug up some of those. I found a lot of weird yarns of witchcraft and so forth, but never one small reference to the "smoking land."

Now, when a fellow has embarked on a long road, he usually refuses to admit that he has come to the end of it and found a blank wall or a falling-off place. And it was so with me. I decided that in the original Esquimaux, there might be phrases which had not been properly translated. And so, to my own amazement, I found myself sitting up at night grinding away at

odd books that try to give a phonetic reproduction of the Esquimaux speech.

It was a hard job, but I managed to pick up a good many words and phrases; some of them I was grateful for later on. Those early studied opened my ears and enabled the actual lingo to sink in on my mind more easily when the right time came.

What I am driving toward is the moment when my preoccupation with the thought of Cleveland Darrell and the picture of that infernal piece of wood that was not wood, made me sell the ranch and start north. You will say that I should have known it was impossible for Darrell not to have been blasted into the most intensely microscopic bits, but on that one night, I was given a fairly thorough introduction to the impossible. I had seen a thunderbolt thrown by a human hand, so to speak! Besides, I never was very logical, and I think I was tired of ranching, anyway.

At any rate, I cleaned up a handsome profit on the sale of my place. I packed my warbag and hit the trail to nowhere . . .

I have to take some long steps, now. It would be pleasant to talk a great deal about the great white North; and I could tell some longish tales about some of the experiences I had learning to punch dogs over the long northern trails, and the men I met.

I kept at it for more than a year, but by the end of that time, I found myself at Point Barrow, back on a trail that I had been over before—so many times, in fact, that already the old-timers would grin when they saw me, and start passing remarks.

My job was hopeless and bad enough, anyway, but it got a great deal worse when I came among fellows who would say to me: "Why, of course I've heard of the 'smoking land' and the way I heard of it was like this—"

And then would follow a long gag the end of which was a big laugh at my expense. They said that I won my nickname of Smoky because I had been so long in the Smoking Land. They cracked a lot of other poor jokes about me and my foolish hobby, if you can call a hungry, driving passion like that a hobby.

But nothing out of that year really matters, down to the time when my Esquimaux

boy, who had worked with me for three months, suddenly caught hold of the stranger who was eating beside my fire and said, laughing, and in broken English, that he had found, at last, a man from the Smoking Land!

## CHAPTER 6

### Blood on the Snow

NOW that I had been so long on the rim of the Arctic, there was nothing unusual about the scene. I remember that the land, the sea-ice, and the sky, were all one pale tone of café-au-lait. It was one of those backgrounds that make objects near at hand look big, and darker than the fact.

The dogs had been fed, and we were cooking our own meal when the stranger showed up and squatted to take his part of the hand out. That's the way with Esquimaux. They always have a hand out for whatever they can get. A really first-class Esquimau doesn't much mind what he receives as long as it is something. He never complains, as long as he is on the plus side of the ledger. I must say that they treat strangers just as they would themselves be treated, and if hobos could stand the cold, they would never have to do a lick of work in an Esquimau village.

I asked my boy what a village would do with a—professional loafer, and he took the matter under advisement for a long time. At last he said that if fate sent such a person among the Esquimaux, the burden would have to be endured.

At any rate, I was accustomed to the begging of the northmen, and I paid little attention to this fellow, simply giving him the smallest third of our rations—there happened to be enough for all hands.

I began to notice the stranger a little more during the meal. In the first place, his dialect was one that I had never heard before during my wanderings among the Esquimaux. All of that year, I had been going after the language as hard as I could, and I was pretty proficient, but now and then I ran into some outlander whose talk was a puzzle to me. This chap was the worst of all.

In the second place, he had the look of a breed—about three-quarters white and the

rest Esquimau. He had the bulk and the shoulders of a white man; he had the length of face, and the hollow cheeks, but I thought that the Esquimau blood showed in the size of his cheekbones, and in the rather cramped, slanting forehead. He had a white man's beard, too, something that one very rarely sees among any full-blooded Esquimaux.

In the third place, his furs, which were handsome to look at, were of a cut and make very different from any that I had ever seen. The stuff looked to me like sea-otter, though I couldn't imagine even an ignorant outlander Esquimau wearing that frightfully expensive fur.

In the fourth place, and almost more important than all the other items, he had a dog the like of which I had never seen. It looked like a cross between a small polar bear and a wolf. It was a dirty yellow white—the natural color for that northern region; and it must have weighed a hundred and fifty, or even more. The head and neck were snaky, like the bear's, but it had a wolf's shoulders, and a wolf's magnificent legs.

It was on account of the dog, chiefly, that I had been considering the fellow's application for a job. He wanted to know if I was going south, and I said that I was. For I had had enough of the white land, and bucking blizzards, and all for the sake of a fool's dream.

"Bound north of Alaska for the Smoking Land," had rung in my ears for so long that I was sick of the thought of it. I was even a little sick of the thought of Cleve Darrell. Mind you, I had been very fond of Darrell; but still my reason was always telling me that he had died back there in a southern land, and the broken side of the mountain was the token and seal of his passing.

Yes, I was going back to the southland, and perhaps there I should find out the best site for a new dude ranch—no, I was tired of talking; but I would begin to be an honest man, and run cattle, and get poor again. In these days, it costs money to be honest and a hard worker!

So I told the strange Esquimau, and had my other boy translate, my firm intention of trekking south. And the stranger seemed interested. He wished to see the southland, he said, and because

his desire to get there was so great, he was willing to work for very little in the way of hire. Also, he had a dog, I could see the dog for myself, and it was clear that I had no other like it, neither did any other man in Alaska have such a dog.

I asked him if his dog worked well in a team, and at this, he laughed—less like an Indian, again, than a disdainful white who knows more than you do. Rotten manners the white race has, compared to any unspoiled native.

When he finished laughing, he said that if I hitched up my eight dogs and put his white brute in the lead, his leader would pull as much as all the rest of the team. And as for food, he would eat one of the other dogs every fifth day, and so, at the end of forty days, there would be an end of the rest of the dogs, and the white leader would have cost no food at all, and the sled would be many hundreds of miles on the journey.

On the whole, I thought that this was one of the neatest little bits of exaggeration that I had ever heard.

Then he demonstrated how the dog could work, and that, I must say, was a sight worth watching. Without a word, just with movements of his head and hand, and very slight movements at that, he sent the big white beast out running over the snow, and worked him here and there, and back and forth. He stopped that dog, and sent him on again, and swung him right and left, and all the while he worked, the dog was at top speed, running with a long, swinging gallop that reminded me of the gait of a thoroughbred. Then he was brought in and gave a lick or two to the snow and lay down at the feet of his master. He was not winded by all of this running. He was just breathing easily, with his eyes half closed, as though he liked this sort of business.

Yes, that was a dog in a hundred, or a thousand, or ten thousand. I thought more of the dog, and more of the master for owning such an animal. On a long inland voyage such as I intended making, a brute of that capacity would be matchless. I leaned over and looked at his pads, and they were big enough for two. One of them was canted a little, so that the toes spread, and I saw that those toes were webbed almost to the nails! Not with

a thin pink filament, but with fur-covered hide!

I still was staring at that webbed foot when I asked the stranger if his dog could swim.

"Swim?" said he. "When you come to open water, he will catch his own fish!"

I was more and more interested.

We had finished eating and were drinking tea. And I put some sugar into the stranger's tin. It was exactly as though I had fed him whisky. His spirits rose with a bound. I've seen the same thing happen more than once with people who are unaccustomed to anything but a meat diet.

When he was at the peak, I asked him where he lived. And he waved his hand to the north.

"Away out!" said he.

"But away out," said I, "there's nothing but sea ice!"

The stranger, at this, drew his head back into his neck furs and squinted at me in an ugly fashion; he said nothing.

AND this was the moment when my other boy laid hold of him, laughing as I have said, and cried out, "Oh-ho, then he comes from the Smoking Land! The Smoking Land!"

And he laughed again, as though his foolish sides would crack. For, you must understand, everyone who had had much to do with me in the far north was always prepared to hitch up every unusual idea with the Smoking Land. If a strange fish were hauled in on the line, it came obviously from the Smoking Land; and if a queer bird sailed through the sky, it was bred in the Smoking Land, also. I was sick of the sound of those words.

But the same phrase had an odd effect upon our stranger. He did not laugh. Instead, he showed a set of strong white teeth through his beard, and he snarled, "You say the thing that is not! You say the thing that is not!"

My boy was fairly rolling in the snow, by this time, but he sat up, gaping and choking like an idiot, now, and pointed with both hands, and shouted, "He comes from the Smoking Land!"

I was smiling a little myself, simply because laughter is infectious, not because I appreciated that stale, worthless joke.

But my smile was extinguished on the spur of the moment, I give you my word, because our stranger, in answer to that long laugh, pulled out a knife that looked as long as my arm, and made a pass for the other lad's throat.

It was not a detached gesture, either. It was followed up by a good long lunge that would have speared my boy as he rolled in the snow, squeaking like a rabbit with fear. But an accidental upfling of his arm parried the lunge and then my lad, getting to his feet, grabbed the arm with which he had made the lucky parry and ran.

I never before had seen any man run over deep snow as though he were wearing spikes on a cinder track.

The big stranger made two steps in pursuit; then he thought of a better idea. He waved to his dog, and the white beast jumped up with a little whine of eagerness, and bounded away in pursuit.

That was a good deal too much for me. Ordinarily, I had let the Esquimaux follow their own little racial whims and fancies without any interference on my part, but I could hardly stand by and see a boy pulled apart by a man-eating dog. And it looked fairly certain that the white devil was not running this game for the first time.

So I pulled out Judge Colt and leveled it at him. "Call back that dog!"

He gave me a horrible squint, but without a word, he waved his arm, and I saw the dog, in the distance, come to a reluctant pause, and then swing slowly about toward his master.

That was not the end of the little parley, however. Mr. Esquimaux, having his at-

tention taken from my boy, was giving all of his most private thoughts to me. He leaned forward a little, and without a word, came straight at me with his knife.

The folly of that staggered me. The man might come from a land very far north, but he surely must have known about firearms—and there was I, covering him!

I never hated to do anything so much, but it looked like my neck or nothing. I fired a bullet straight into his breast!

I say that I fired the bullet "into" his breast, because as a matter of fact I saw where it hit, and saw him half stopped by the weight of the impact, but he wasn't entirely stopped, and he failed to drop. Also, the sound it had made was not the sickening *chug* of a slug driving into flesh. It was a hard, flat sound, like that made by banging a hammer on a thick board.

I was dizzy with the thought; my head spun about. But I put the twin brother of that bullet right on the spot where the first one had landed.

Yes, I saw that big brute of a man begin to laugh with a murderous fury of exultation as he sprang in on me with his arm strained back for the finishing stroke.

## CHAPTER 7

### The Frightened Liar

**T**HERE are not many things that one can trust in this world, and I had always known it, but I made an exception in favor of Judge Colt. I had worn him next to my heart for a good many years, and if I treated him with

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proper care and precaution, he never failed me—never! Until then.

And it looked to be the last moment that anything on earth could be of interest to me. It was not quick thinking that gave me a moment of respite, but by a natural gesture, I threw up my gun hand to ward away that devilish knife.

There I had my first touch of luck, for the long, heavy barrel of the gun *whanged* the knife-hand of the Esquimau right across his mittened fingers. He brought his hand down, and it thumped me on the breast where he had intended to drive the knife home. But there was no steel in his grip; the knife had slipped out of his nerveless fingers and dropped into the crusted snow, where it stuck upright, trembling, and gleaming.

In the meantime, I grabbed him, only to find that I had embraced a round of boiler plate, so to speak. I understood, in the same flash, why neither of my bullets had gone home. Bullets are intended to bump their soft lead noses into still softer flesh, and this rascal from nowhere was wearing armor of some sort under his furs.

I might as well have embraced a barrel; but his first hug nearly broke my back. It sent a bursting rush of blood up behind my eyes so that I saw everything through a red swirl, and leaping through the crimson haze came the man-hunting dog. Oh, he meant business, let me tell you, with his beady little eyes almost blotted out by a wolfish grin, and his fangs looking almost as long as his master's knife.

I struck at him with a half-arm stroke and whacked him right between those beady eyes; the weight of his charge crashed blindly against his master and me, and sent us toppling over in the snow.

I was underneath the man, and the Esquimau got my throat in one hand and picked his knife out of the snow with the other, as calmly as any lady would pick a needle out of a big white pin cushion. All of his teeth were showing through his beard, too. And then I smashed him in the face with the barrel of my gun.

A Colt is the handiest short club in the world. The Esquimau turned into jelly and I crawled out from under the quivering, jerking mass of it to find the white

dog running in short circles, holding his head down and trying to shake the cobwebs out of it.

I drew a bead on him, but I didn't shoot. Something came between my trigger finger and the trigger to stop me, because I remembered that a dog is only what training makes it, and that this fellow's savagery wasn't really anything he was responsible for. I was glad that something had stopped me.

The dog's wits cleared, almost at the same instant, and he sat down and canted his head to one side, and looked at me and at the gun in the canniest way imaginable, as though he were saying, "This is not in the book. I have to study this lesson before I can recite."

When I turned my back on him, he failed to budge, so I gathered that I was free from danger from him, at least; and a mighty weight it was off my mind, for I would rather have faced another pair of men in armor than that swerving, ponderous, lightning-fast body, with its knife-like, jagged teeth ready to snap and tear at me.

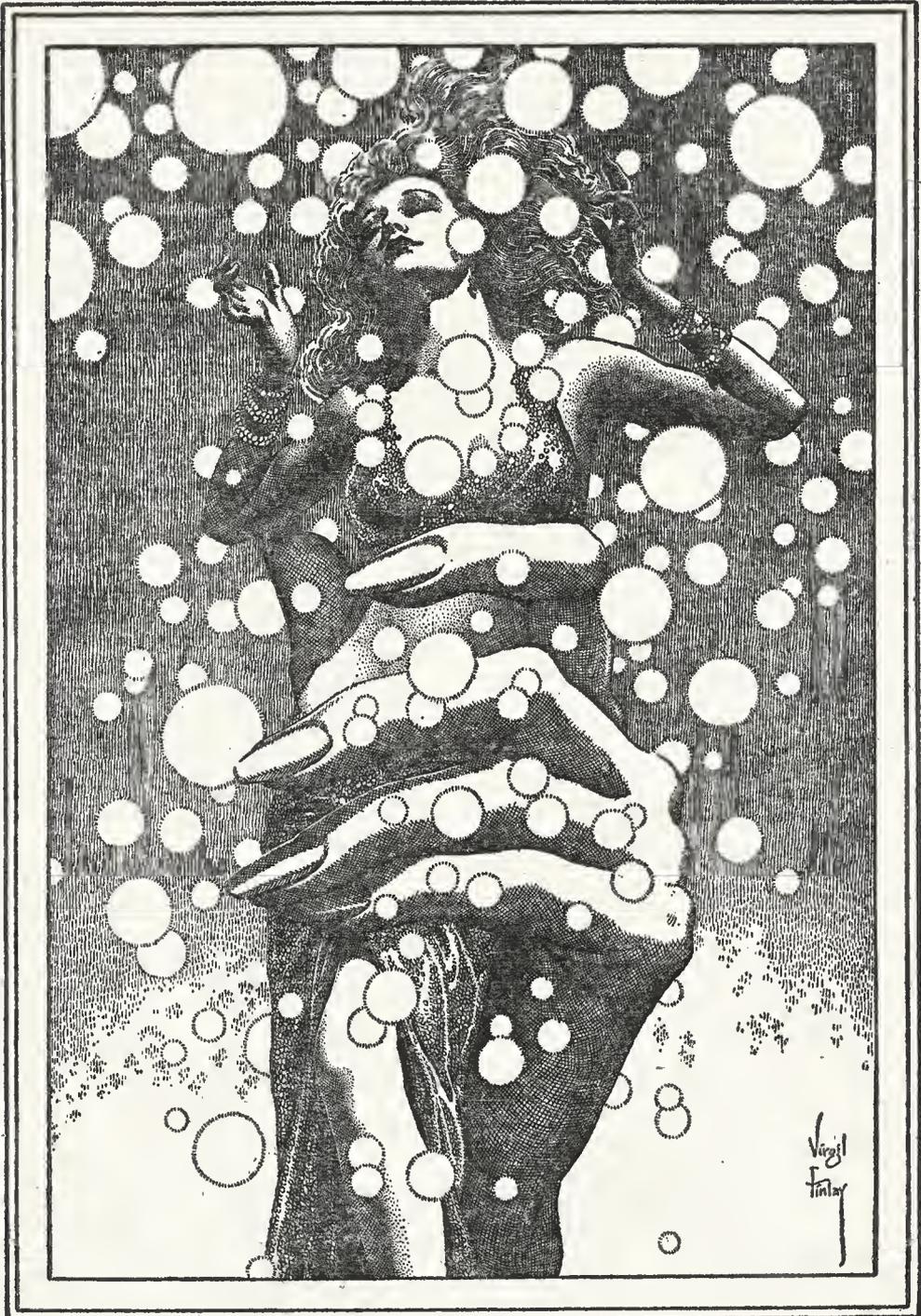
I gave my attention, now, to the outlander, and since he was still muttering and groaning, quite unconscious, I opened his furs at the chest and my fingers rubbed against wood, or something that felt like it.

However, wood does not turn a bullet fired pointblank from a Colt .45. So I opened his furs wider and saw something that was a thunderclap in my brain; it made me feel a little dizzy.

For I was looking down on the same stuff upon which the message had been scratched—"Bound north of Alaska to the Smoking Land and . . ."

Yes, the same texture of wood, the look of wood, the brownish-gray color of wood—and the substance of the hardest steel! I rapped the butt of the gun as hard as I could on the face of that cuirass, and a hollow sound came back at me, but I could not see that it made the smallest dent on the surface!

But, hard as the stuff was, totally impenetrable as it seemed, I saw that small holes had been bored in it and through these holes passed a lacing of strong gut by which the armor could be taken on and off.



The arm of the goddess was long and strong and sure.

I UNTIED the string, pulled it loose, and then, with a strong pull, I turned Mr. Esquimau out of his enchanted armor. When he tumbled on his face in the snow, he came to himself with a start and got up, staggering, pulling the furs about his open breast, again, to keep out the stabbing knives of the cold.

In the meantime, I put away my Colt and took up the fallen knife. It was a beautiful piece of bluish-gray steel with a blade that tapered like the dripping point of an icicle. It was supple as the wind, and as penetrating as a fork of lightning. With that in my hand—and with the white dog still neutral—I stepped up close to the man from the North and said to him, in something as near his own dialect as I could manage, that if he attempted to run away, I would stick him right through his middle.

He blinked at me and said nothing, but I knew that he had understood.

"Now," said I, "you speak to me with a tongue that cannot say the thing that is not. Where did you get this thing?"

I pointed to the armor on the snow.

"I found it down by the shore, washing back and forth in the driftwood. I had gone to pick up driftwood for a fire. And I found this."

"You have spoken, already, a thing that is not," I said. "A man does not pick up wet driftwood to make a fire. Where it is awash, there is a lot more of it safe and dry on the beach. Now try again, and tell me where you got this thing."

"It is clear that you are one of the wise ones," said he. "It is true that I did not pick it up among the driftwood on the beach. But I worked one summer unloading a ship at Point Barrow. And I found this thing in the ship, and I took it away with me."

Take him all in all, he was a good liar of the hearty, natural school, one of the kind that looks you fairly in the eye and speaks out simply and bluntly—and knows not the truth at all.

There was a raging fire in me. I began to know that my strange trail was not ending in nothing. I could not put all the pieces of evidence together, but I was willing to swear, now, that there was, somewhere, a Smoking Land.

"Twice you have told me the thing that

is not," I said. "The third time if you do so, I shall run your own knife through your heart and leave you for the wolves to eat. Yes, or my own dogs may have you before you are dead. And that white fellow, yonder, may enjoy a taste of you. Tell me the truth. You brought this from the Smoking Land!"

He grew smaller in a sudden jerk, as his knees sagged.

"You brought it from the Smoking Land," said I. "Tell me the truth."

"I know nothing," said he.

But his eyes were unsteady, and when a man cannot meet your glance, he is fighting a battle already more than half lost.

"You came from the Smoking Land," said I. "That's why you wanted to murder me. Because you don't want the thing known."

"He laughed at me," said he. "That is why I tried to kill him."

"I didn't laugh at you," said I.

"I was already in the madness, when I ran at you," said he. Yes, he had talent, great though unimproved talent. He was never without a word of answer.

So I took the very long blade and laid its needle point on his breast, and as he winced, I knew that the burning finger was sinking through his skin, drawing out a trickle of blood.

"You are less to me than a mad dog," said I. "So now I am going to kill you, because I have promised to do so. But I give you one more chance to live. You came from the Smoking Land!"

There was brightness and a shadow in his eyes, in quick succession, as he decided to throw himself at me, and then as he changed his mind, deciding that the knife was much too close to his heart for him to try it.

And, after that, his face, his whole body loosened and weakened. He wavered as a rag sways in a light wind, a wet, heavy rag that dangles freshly soaked on the line.

I waited, for I saw that speech of any kind was impossible to him, just then.

Finally he said, "Yes, I am from the Smoking Land! The wizards and the devils have told you! The witches have whispered it in your ear."

This was what he said that almost stopped my heart. The agony with which he spoke made me sure that he was not

lying, this time. And my thought jumped back to the laboratory, and the dreadful night of the explosion, and that moment seemed to be only ten seconds, and not a whole year, before this.

And I was robed with a new strength, because it seemed to me that now I could not fail. One always feels that way when, after following a dim idea, new and sudden light strikes across the trail and shows you even a small part of truth in what you have been dreaming.

I was not through with the Esquimau. I started to pump him some more; of course I wanted to rush at once to questions about Cleve Darrell, in that mysterious northern country, wherever it might be. But I found that I had reached a stumbling block.

"I have said too much for fear of death," said the Esquimau. "But already I am dying. I can feel their hands on me, and their fire. Kill me when you please, because I shall be ready to die. To die by a bullet or the stroke of a knife is sweetness and a pleasure compared to what they will do! They will cut me in ten thousand pieces, and each separate piece shall die a separate death!"

## CHAPTER 8

### Luck and a Rifle

**I**T WAS time, of course, to hold my horses. The man had more than he could stand; he was literally full to the lips with icy fear, so I stopped bearing down on him.

I secured him by tying his hands behind him with all of the knots I could devise.

For now there were the signs of an approaching blizzard, and I set to work making a snow house against the blow. I got it roughed out and completed fairly before the real weight of the wind struck us, and washed over us like a tide of freezing water. One of those northern storms has such power that to stand against the wind is really like wading through the shooting tide that races down a flume. And when I got inside the shelter, and the Esquimau with me, I was fairly contented.

If the blizzard lasted a few days, I cared not a straw. I had food enough to last both me and my dogs; I was not far from

Point Barrow to get new supplies later on, and in short, I felt that I was a master of circumstance—for the moment. My captive did not complain. He lay down and turned his face to the wall and soon fell asleep.

It was like the sleep of an unhappy dog, for during hours and hours, his body would be twitching, and whimperings and moanings would come out of his throat.

Once he sat bolt upright and stared about him with nightmare eyes, his face covered with sweat. When he saw me, the fear seemed to go out of him again; he lay down and slept once more.

In the morning I would put such screws on him as never had been put on a man before. I reasoned in this way: that he was a murderer, that he had shown the will to murder and tried a very good hand with me at the game; that therefore I was at liberty to do as I pleased with him, as with a creature whose own life was forfeit. In short, though this does not make good reading, I had determined to get his secret out of him, if steel could tear it, or fire burn it free!

So I sat up and watched him, until sleep began to overpower me. Then, at last, I put the knife under my body. The revolver I hung under the pit of my arm. I lay down and slept. It couldn't have been for very long.

When I wakened, I sat up with a yawn, not very much refreshed, for the air is pretty dead inside an icehouse. And outside it, where I should have to go soon to feed the dogs, the blizzard was screaming with a stronger voice than ever. I shook my head.

And then the memory of the day before, and the thought of the Smoking Land, and poor Cleve Darrell, came rushing back to me and roused me in earnest. The aches and the pains went out of me, and I turned to find my captive.

He was gone!

After the first shudder, I made up my mind that he would quite soon return. Nothing could face that blast, and few living things would care to even creep before it. He, being desperate to get away, might have tried, but a few minutes would convince him of his foolishness. I was prepared to smile when he came struggling in again, half frozen. I thought, too,

of my poor bearer—wondered what had happened to him after he had fled from the dog's vicious rush, and if he had suffered much before the snow and wind and cold finally did for him.

I sat down and waited for another hour, and by the end of that time, I knew that I had lost my outlander. Wherever he was outside of the house, unless he had managed to free his hands, he was dead by this time.

There was no remorse in me for his sake, or very little. Because I told myself that whatever or wherever the Smoking Land, might be, it was a place from which this rascal had fled in order to escape from *them*, whoever *they* might be. That was why he had been so desperately eager to go south, that was why he was willing to take such low wages and throw in the services of his man-hunting dog. Yes, there must be crime behind him, a crime of such proportions that it had bounded him out of my hut and made him throw himself away in the storm.

But how I cursed myself that I had not managed to tear his secrets out of his unwilling mouth. I knew now that there *was* a Smoking Land to be reached. And nothing more.

So far as I knew there were merely some islands to the north, none of them a Smoking Land, and the rest of the wide waste stretching to the Pole was sea-ice. What fool would adventure blindly out on that ice, on that shifting, cruel trail?

The blizzard lasted another full day. When it ended, I went out and found, first and foremost, two of my dogs dead and half eaten; and near one of the carcasses, with the telltale red stain still about its muzzle and breast, was the man-hunting dog of the lost Esquimau.

I got out my gun, but at the sight of it the big dog simply ran a little distance and then stopped.

I almost laughed, angry and fierce as I was at the dog's idiotic notion that a gun could not kill at that short distance. But while I hesitated, it came back, whining, and then turned away and jogged off in the direction it had taken before, plainly asking me to follow. So, after fastening on my snow shoes, I trekked along behind him.

I guessed what the trail would be, and

when the direction continued straight south, I knew that it was after the Esquimau that we were voyaging.

We went two or three miles before the dog stopped and scratched at the snow. There I started digging, and a yard under the frozen upper crust, I found the man from Smoking Land lying peacefully asleep, and forever.

There was no pain in his face, but a dreary, blurred, frozen expression.

There was nothing I could do except to examine his clothes and find what I could that might help me afterwards. But I found nothing at all—there was only that magnificent suit of furs.

So I took those furs.

I'm afraid that it sounds ghoulish, but before me was a trail the mere thought of which stopped my heart. And if this man had come from the Smoking Land, probably I would need just such body covering to keep me from freezing on the way. I took the furs, therefore, and when I had stripped him, I found, exactly in the center of his breast, a mark that looked like a rudely shaped M.

It was not a very old scar. It was puckered blue, but it had the look of a cut that had been made within a few months at the outside. And I took to wondering what that letter could stand for.

*M* could stand for *month*, or *merry*, or a lot of other things. But in English speech it would generally stand for *murder*.

And that fitted in with my own guesses about him.

SO I went back to my team gloomy and grim. My problem was beginning to be more and more complicated. Had this man been branded for a crime—and driven out from the Smoking Land to perish? Was it only by chance that he had managed to make the mainland?

But, if that was so, what manner of people were they in the Smoking Land—who practiced the use of the alphabet as civilized people know it?

It was another puzzler, and perhaps because it came on top of so much other mystery, it seemed to me the most confusing and heartbreaking problem of all.

From where I was, it was about three days to Point Barrow. I harnessed up and

marched, making a dangerous experiment by using the white dog in the lead. It was no good. As a leader, he was a marvel. He was swift and tireless, and could read the snow in a marvelous way. But he could not be worked with other dogs. I watched him like a hawk every moment I was awake, but on each of the first two halts, he killed a dog. It was no longer a question of hunger but plainly and solely because he was a fighter—and a killer.

I saw his second murder, though not the first. I was sound asleep, when a great outbreak of noise brought me to my feet and out of the shelter tent. There I saw Murder, as I began to call him, running about the rest of the team. The big huskies stood tail to tail in a close circle, their teeth ready for him; but in spite of them, and before I could shout, the white snake leaped in, struck with an odd whip-lash motion of his head, and dodged back again with his teeth deep in a writhing dog. The others followed, but when he dropped his victim and showed his teeth again, back they went into their huddle.

When I got to the spot, the husky—my best wheeler—was kicking the snow for the last time; his throat had been torn open.

Still I persisted in trying to tame him. But I got into Point Barrow minus four dogs, minus the white-skinned Esquimau, minus my original bearer, and plus nothing but the strange cuirass of the dead man, and one touch of maddening hope—that the Smoking Land might be out there north, in the ice.

One thing at least I had learned: I did not speak of the Smoking Land any more. I had made myself a joke for too long, and now I simply wanted to get the best advice as to where an island, a considerable island, must lie out there to the north.

The moment I adopted this tack, I got results, and cursed myself for not having done it before. I found that every whaler in those troubled waters firmly believed in the existence of a large body of land somewhere towards the Ice Pole. I found that even meteorologists were apt to explain certain peculiarities of the wind by supposing a mass of land—either one island or several—in the same direction. Why had I not learned this many, many months before? Simply because the en-

chanted and infernal phrase, *Smoking Land*, had always been in my mouth.

Well, since my encounter with the white Esquimau, I was convinced of the existence of that land; now I wanted simply to know where it was and how to get there.

I have to explain about the Ice Pole to some of you, perhaps. The true North Pole, the North Pole of Amundsen and Peary, lies about a thousand miles north of Point Barrow. But that is not the hardest point for an explorer to reach. The center of difficulty, when it comes to travel, lies in another direction. It is west of north and about eight hundred miles from the Point. What makes it difficult to get at is the sweep of ice jams that surround it; the true Pole is much nearer—nearer by two hundred miles—to the outer rim of this center of difficulty.

I learned most of these things—at least, I learned them in the most convincing fashion, from Scanderov, the great Norwegian explorer, who was at Point Barrow during my stay. And I opened my heart to him and told him that I had a reason for wanting to risk my neck, if necessary, but that I would like to get across the ice to find that far-off land, the most inaccessible in the world, if it existed at all.

**B**UT Scanderov had an ugly nature, in a sense. He had a wide, thin-lipped mouth and a blunt jaw, and little, grim eyes, and when I told him of my desire and asked for his advice and opinion, he simply said, "You'll break your neck if you try, but you'll never reach the Ice Pole!"

That was discouraging. But then, I had lived rubbing elbows with discouragement for more than a year and a half, with a dream of Cleveland Darrell always in the back of my brain. Despair can become a neighbor so familiar that at length it will be despised. And so it was by me, at this time. To the man of many disappointments, one grain of the least encouragement is a wine that lasts for years; and I had had my encouragement from the dead man!

I never would have had any luck with Scanderov had it not been for Murder. It was on account of Murder that he had

wasted any time on me in the beginning, for he was a fellow who never threw away his time on strangers. But the look of the white dog interested him, and he wanted to know where I had got Murder from. It was a thing about which I did not like to talk. I naturally did not want to tell about the death of a man whose hands I had tied behind his back; so I just touched lightly on the story and said that I'd traded the dog for two of my own.

As I say, it was Murder that first gained me the wise ear of Scanderov; and it was Murder again who finally made Scanderov open the book of his mind to me. It happened in this way.

I kept the white dog muzzled while I was about the Point. There was something about him—either his look or bulk, or the fishy scent of him, perhaps, that made the rest of his kind steer clear of him. Scanderov even suggested that he was not really a dog at all, but a new vulpine species that closely resembled a dog. He went on talking about the teeth, but got into such a language about molars, dentals, canines, and such that I could not follow him.

But one day the strap of the muzzle broke while Murder was at my heels, and before I knew what he was up to, he was a good fifty yards off, attacking the pet dog of a half-breed Indian.

The breed emptied his rifle at Murder, and I more than half hoped that he would kill him, but shooting at Murder in flight, was like shooting at a snipe in full flight down the wind. The breed missed every shot, gave his dead dog a look, and then decided to take it out on me.

He made a swift dash at me, his knife out and descending just as I was getting ready to use my fists. I grabbed the knife and jerked it out, but the breed's blade struck swiftly down at my breast.

Except for a thing, I had forgotten, I was a dead man. I felt death with my eyes, I tell you, when I saw the blurred flash of the steel driving home. But it crashed to bits with a shivering sound like breaking glass, and there stood the breed with the useless hilt of the knife in his hand. It had burst to bits against the cuirass I was still wearing—wearing not for protection, but to keep it out of idle, envious hands, and from the path of gos-

sip. That was really a very lucky break.

So I tickled the hollow of the breed's throat with the point of my knife, and told him to quiet down and behave.

There were two things about this that interested Scanderov, who happened to be standing by. He watched desperately to know what I was wearing that had turned the tempered point of that breed's knife; and he wanted to know something about the origin of my own weapon—the one I had taken from the white Esquimau.

When he came at me with the questions, I said, "Here's the knife. Take a look for yourself."

His eye fairly devoured it. "Where did you get it?"

"Look here, Scanderov," said I, "you want to know why I wear a charmed life, and—"

"I don't give a rap about your life."

"You want to know what I'm wearing under my furs, and about the dog, and about the knife. Well, Scanderov, I want to learn everything that you know about the Ice Pole, and how to get there."

**H**E STARED at me with a sort of fierce contempt in his eyes; as though I had asked a poet to teach me how to write the most beautiful lyric in the world, or the greatest epic. Finally he said, "All right, I'll exchange information with you."

"You'll owe me some boot, then. Buy me dinner and a bottle of whiskey, and I'll do most of the talking."

We talked until long after midnight. I told him the whole incredible story, beginning with Cleveland Darrell, and the explosion . . .

There is a sort of blood relationship among scientists, and I can't tell you how Scanderov's ears pricked up when he heard Darrell's name.

I carried straight through with the weird night in the laboratory and I wound up with the halfbreed Esquimau—if that was what he was—lying frozen, face down in the snow, and that mark on his chest.

Scanderov gave me his undivided attention. He picked up the knife, for the fortieth time, and turned from that to the cuirass, which I had unbuckled and laid on the table before him.

Then he said, as he flicked the thin,

tapering knife blade with his thumb and forefinger, and let it jerk free and vibrate with a saspish hum:

"There's no other piece of wood like this one, except the bit in the Smithsonian. There's no other bit of steel like this, either. Not in the entire world. I know something about metallurgy. No place, that is to say, except perhaps in your Smoking Land."

"You don't believe in such a place?" said I.

"Disbelief and belief, I try to rule out of my mind," said Scanderov.

"However," said I, "now I'll listen to your part of the bargain. How am I to go get to the Ice Pole? What do you think is the best procedure?"

"Take dogs and travel," said Scanderov.

I controlled my temper. "I want special information, about the journey," said I. "How am I to try to make it?"

"With luck," said Scanderov.

That got me fighting mad, but after all, he was a gentleman and did live up to our agreement. He simply meant that he considered the journey impossible, even for himself; how, then, could a crude new hand like me accomplish anything? That was logical, on his part. But beyond that point of logic, he went on to tell me everything that he could. He did not spare any detail.

In the first place, he chilled my blood by saying that I would have to travel alone, for the good reason that I should never be able to get anyone to go with me. In the second place, he told me just what my outfit should consist of, and he broached the idea with which Stefansson had startled the world some time back—that a man with a good rifle and a touch of skill never need to starve when he's on Arctic ice. For there is plenty of life in that water to support whole shoals of fish, and the fish support wide-scattered armies of seals, and wherever seals hunt, they have to come to the ice holes to breathe and be killed, or lie on the ice basking—and be killed.

That, in short, was the plan which Scanderov evolved for me: a rifle, a light sled-boat, ammunition, and luck! And then perhaps if by a miracle I survived—the Ice Pole.

## CHAPTER 9

### Sea Journey

FROM the first, Scanderov told me that I was, plainly, a fool. He said that a picked crew of about five men, and perhaps thirty of the finest dogs, perfect equipment, and so one would have one chance in twenty of reaching the goal; or of making a safe return. One man alone could never turn the trick.

"Well, so far as I know," I said, "one man made the trip from the Smoking Land to Alaska. So one man ought to be able to return."

He looked at me and said nothing, but his eyes were considering me gravely.

Then he remarked, "I'm not sorry for fellows like you. You get a lifetime of fun out of the craziest sort of an adventure, and the fun lasts up to the death struggle. So what's the loss to you? When I say that one man has no chance I simply mean—well, a sprained ankle can make a whole party of seven or eight limp; but a sprained ankle is death to a single man."

"I won't sprain my ankle, then."

He grinned at me with real friendship. And he argued no more, but gave me all the help he could.

I contributed one idea of my own. I was to be single-handed; and therefore I might as well work with a single dog, and a one-dog sled-boat! It would save trouble in the care of the dogs, it would save ammunition that would otherwise be used up in shooting food for the animals. And I had in Murder a dog as strong as three, with an instinct for all northern difficulties of the trail.

Scanderov thought it might be difficult to work out a sled-boat light enough to handle and yet big enough to hold a man and a dog. But we proved that the thing could be done.

I spent a solid month making preparations. Everything was worked out by hand; I don't think that I took with me a single ready-made article except a rifle and the ammunition for it. That was one place where I had to be extravagant, for as Scanderov said, it would be easy to starve without bullets for the gun; whereas if I were overloaded, I could simply throw away a part of the load at any time.

If the rifle finally used up its last shot, then I could fall to with a harpoon, Esquimau fashion.

The Esquimaux laughed when they saw the size of the sled. And in other ways, it was the strangest sled ever made, I dare say, because the material of which it was composed was almost entirely whalebone. Whalebone and best sinew, welded and compounded until maximum strength and minimum weight were attained. When the sled was finished, I could handle it with one hand. I could throw it about, and no matter how it struck, it neither dented nor broke!

The heaviest item was the canvas which was to be my tent, my bed wrapping, and the skin to fit over the sled, and turn it into a canoe! My skis, fitted in crisscross at the center of the sled, would distend the sides and give me a craft, when occasion rose, capable of transporting a very considerable weight of provisions or other necessities.

But there were few other necessities. A knife, a gun, ammunition, the sled, the oil-soaked canvas, the dog. That was about all.

Then the time came to march out into the sea ice.

I hired a pair of packers to get me over the ridge of ice thrown up by the winter jams; we labored most of the day, and then I found myself out on the smoother ice of the open sea. There I said goodbye to the Esquimaux, and to Scanderov. We didn't waste many words, but my heart was turned to water by an odd thing. One of the natives began to laugh. I don't know what had struck him so funny. An Esquimau will laugh at anything, if it happens to hit him in the right way. At any rate, that fool followed me with his loud laughter for a long distance, and for days and weeks afterwards the throb and the weird wailing of the sound hung in my ears, and got somehow into my blood.

I WAS started, however. At the last moment I would have turned back, because my knees were so literally unstrung that I had to go forward with short steps. But shame compelled me. Shame is a queer devil. The murderer who has made a mockery of shame by the shamelessness of his crime, yet may feel the shame of

cowardice that turns him into a hero on the scaffold. I was playing the hero or fool out there on the open ice, realizing that to talk about a thing is very different from doing it.

But I don't want to talk about the ice. I could write hundreds of thousands of words about it, because those days are written into my memory with the sort of ink that traces a thousand words a minute and never fades out! But I have to get at what lay behind the ice. I have to get at the Smoking Land, since that is the shore I reached. Yes, I may as well throw away suspense, and put myself on that shore.

Yet I am almost irresistibly tempted to put in something for the eight months of my journey over the ice.

Why do I call it a journey at all? Why shouldn't I speak of my voyage? Because, during nearly every moment of the day, I was being carried by one current or another, drifting pretty steadily.

I should like to write at length, for instance, of how I found myself sailing on a fifty-acre island of ice, and how I kept on sailing on it for a month, sometimes seeing other ice lands in the distance, blue and gleaming, and sometimes, again, voyaging alone through an empty sea! That island was kind to me. It brought the seals to bask on its shore, fattening Murder and me. And above all, while I was on it, the currents bore it almost steadily toward the North.

I remember the thrilling, pulsing, upwelling joy that kept my heart in my throat for four days, because during those days a powerful gale was striking that island, and making it tremble, and smashing it with ponderous waves—but all the while that gale hung due in the south, and drove me gloriously on my chosen way.

My white island split in two, divided, and redivided, and at last, one day, I found that I was walking on a surface that had once been level, but which was now rapidly sloping to the side. I was amazed. There was no wind pressure then, to account for the thing. It was as though some subterranean monster were thrusting up against my island from beneath, but as the angle increased, I realized at last that my iceberg was simply turning over! A trick the scoundrels have, I never knew why!

Well, I had, literally, exactly half an

hour to get my stuff together, the canvas over the sled, and myself and Murder in it, before the island began to heel more and more rapidly.

I pushed off, and suddenly the whole mass, as though waiting for that signal, turned bottom up.

I heard the upper part of the berg smite the water on the other side with a tremendous crashing, and in the meantime, not a yard from my boat, the bottom ice slid upward, endlessly, smooth, blue as though oiled, shining like the belly of a great fish.

And with its movement, it cast out shuddering waves, like those which wriggle out from the side of a great liner.

Those waves pushed me back to a safer distance. And now I sat in the sled-boat and looked gloomily back at my happy home—upside down!

It sounds funny to say it, but it was *not* funny, at that moment. It was damned dismal, and there was not a solitary gleam of ice in any direction through that close, gray day, and the sea was choppy, tossing my feather of a boat about, and tossing in a gallon or so of water, now and then.

And Murder? He sat in the center of the boat, with his head pointing true as any compass needle a little west of north! Yes, I knew then, and I had guessed it before, that Murder had an instinct as sure as that of a bird winging home! What a magnificent dog!

I had a bright idea after a time. Although my island had turned over, it was still an island, though a smaller one. So I simply hauled to the leeward of it, and found a place where the cliff could be scaled, and landed again.

**I**T WAS not as comfortable as before, for the surface was sheer ice; whereas previously I had had a hard blanket of snow underfoot. However, the berg sailed on, upside down, and bore me eventually into a white hell, where all the devils were howling and smashing a crystal world about each other's ears. I mean, it brought me into a great ice jam.

I did about ten miles in ten days, going through that grinding inferno. And then it split away beneath me; and I drove for days in a terrible gale that kept me drenched with spray and put in my ears a worse sound than the loon-laughter of that half-witted Esquimau!

That was in the eighth month of my journey.

I think that I had given up any real hope about three or four months before, and the only thing that kept me going, paddling north through the iron-gray, icy water, or trekking overland with the might of Murder hauling at the traces, was a blind determination born out of the very years which I had already devoted to the quest. For long invested time is in itself a sort of capital which pays you an interest, after a while, and keeps your hands at your work.

But on this day, I made sure that I was passing to the end of the world and of my life, too, for the gale blew me from the southward towards a low-flying cloud. It was darker below, and lighter above. And suddenly even the nerve of Murder seemed to have deserted him, for he sat down and howled like the fiend that he was.

Was it this that cleared my tired eyes for me, and made me look again? At any

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A white hell where all the devils were howling and smashing a crystal world. . . .



rate, it was then that I knew I was blowing upon a lee shore!

## CHAPTER 10

### The Running Dog

**Y**ES, it was what my heart had always known it would be—as like a thing once actually seen, and remembered out of childhood—a vision that did not shrink at the touch of reality. Rather, it grew greater and greater, expanding, heightening; sprang beyond my sight to the right hand and to the left, and lifted into iron peaks, from the broken top of the highest of which, half seen, a dark mist rolled forth upon the wind.

It was the Smoking Land!

Now, I am not ordinarily very emotional; and to this day I can hardly imagine myself doing what I know I did then. I dropped upon my knees, and put up my hands like a child, and thanked God. For there it was, clearer than my

dream. And in it, I told myself, was Cleveland Darrell—“bound north of Alaska for the Smoking Land and—”

And—what?

Well, perhaps I should find that out, also, and what power or powers had snatched him away to this end of the world.

Now, at the very time that I saw the end of my long labor before me and the goal under the touch of my eyes, at that very moment my thankfulness, my gratitude, my joy washed out of me in a single breath.

For I’ve mentioned that I was blown on a mere ragged fragment of ice, making with a swift current towards a lee shore.

To right and to left the cliffs came out, vast and sheer, gleaming and adrip with ice and the dull twilight. And to my right and left the cliffs stood forth, while I drove on my staggering sheet of ice straight into the hollow maw of a bay.

To have aimed at the solid wall of the

cliffs would have been better, for the bay, like a savage, enormous mouth, was fitted with teeth matched to its size. Broken, jutting rocks received the rush of the waves, and the waters were turned to spray and spume that flung hundreds of feet upward, I swear, and then blew as level rain out of sight across the unknown land.

The longer sway of the open sea gave way to a sickening and irregular pitch, like the leaping of a bucking horse. We rose and fell, rose and fell.

And now all was blotted out by the denseness of a passing squall; and when I looked again, the cliffs were changed and brought nearer and made more terrible by their white sheath of snow.

My heart was sinking, before. But now it lay like a stone in the bottom of the pit. I was too frightened to feel fear. I was too overwhelmed by the awesomeness of the sight, and by the majesty of the sound, though I knew that the next moment I would be plunged to certain death on the rocks.

And they seemed to me to move, the waves standing still, and the unspeakable granite jaws closing upon the verge of the sea and blowing it forth again like a white smoke.

We came down with a rush on a jutting point—and then swerving with an unexpected current a little to the side, I saw before me a dim and glimmering hope, for the rocks parted and what seemed a safe cove was revealed.

I say what seemed a safe cove, for I had only the merest glimpse of it through the thundering and the dashing of that moment, and then a great wave, a master wave of them all, picked up us—me and the sled and the great dog Murder, and the little ice island under us—and whirled us in the air as a child spins a top, and flung us forward like a stone.

I think the mere flight through the air was what knocked me out of . . . time!

For I remember that my wild impression was of being a youngster again and standing in a great shop, piled with crockery, and with fragile, beautiful glass vases all around, and the whole mass crasling with a sort of music about my ears.

Then I woke up, frozen, being choked by hands that worked on my throat.

**I**T WAS Murder, who had me by the nape of the neck and was tugging back with all of his might, pulling me out of the freezing wash of the water along the shore.

I got up, as well as I could. I thought that my right hip was broken, where the revolver had jammed against it, but then I found that I could walk.

Still, I had no real consciousness of safety. No more safe than a man who has landed on the very shores of the region of death, so leaden-dark, and so filled with thunder was all of this land before me.

But then I saw a little distance ahead of me, my sled, lying unbroken, neither on its side nor on its back, but right side up, as though waiting to be used, and that sight, oddly enough, restored my courage and my wits in a single stroke.

What was in the sled was secure enough, having been lashed to the thwarts. I got out the harness, and with my stiff hands managed to fasten Murder in place. Then I made a weaving way among the rocks and up the slope and over the up-standing rim of cliffs which received the blast of the south wind.

Once over the hill, the yell of the storm grew less, and that was a help. A vast noise is to the brain like a blanket which stifles the mouth. It was an unbelievable relief when I found myself under shelter from the wind and from the racket. And then I found a small stream of water running down the hillside, issuing from the dark mouth of a cave.

It did not strike me as strange, at first, when I saw water *running*. But when I realized that the comparative trickle should have been frozen solidly across, long ago, I went to it staggered with amazement.

As I went nearer, I saw that it was just the darkness of the cave that clouded the sheen of the stream; there was actually a vapor rising thickly from its surface. The water was hot—so hot that I could hardly touch it!

It had been eight months since I had known anything warmer than the blood of a newly killed seal, or the horribly smoking flame of my primus stove, over which I cooked. And now here was heat actually flowing over the frozen ground of the Arctic!

I felt my forehead knot hard in a frown. I was greatly worried. I wanted to do something about it. I wanted to stop that stupid waste. There was enough water here to pipe through a whole town, and keep it snugly warm. Enough water running hot to have a large-scale commercial adaptation. I could not guess how many tons of coal per day would be necessary to heat so much water to such a temperature.

Then all of this problem dissolved, and left me laughing at my foolishness, for I realized that I was in the Smoking Land, some eight hundred miles as the bird flies from the nearest outpost of civilization—some eight months' journey lay behind me.

Yes, I could realize, now, exactly what Scanderov had meant when he said that I would have unfailing luck with me, night and day. For luck and Murder had literally pulled me through by the nape of the neck!

Sometime I would have to face the ghastly impossibility of return, though I could hardly hope that luck like that would come twice to one man. At the moment, though, I could put that thought behind me. There was enough and more than enough in the present to fill my mind!

I was hungry, my furs and face were caked with ice; I was weak, and wobbly in the knees. The shock I had been through had been so great that I was still thawing out nervously, so to speak, inch by inch, and there still seemed to be yards of ice surrounding my heart.

So I got up there in the mouth of that cave from which the hot stream poured, and from the sled put out my supplies, put the seal fat into the primus stove, and lighted it with a match from my fold of oiled silk, and started cooking, and adding another layer of soot to the deep aggregate which had been settling on me throughout these months. For I had long ago ceased being a white man. There was enough pure carbon on my hide to make a gross of lead pencils. I could have written an encyclopedia, using myself for the inkpot, so to speak.

However, there I sat, shivering a little, only as uncomfortable, say, as a cat in a hail storm, and comforting a belly already filled with meat, with the heat, the fra-

grance and the black powder of well boiled tea. Murder, too, had eaten, and we both rested.

## CHAPTER 11

### The Men Appear

**W**ELL, I had spent enough time resting at the cave, so I hitched Murder to the sled and turned inland toward the great smoking mountain in the distance. As I traveled, it grew greater and greater. From the distance, it seemed to have fellows well nigh as high, but as I drew closer to it, I saw that it must be at least ten thousand feet high—perhaps three miles of mountain lifting up there.

As I went along, I got a clearer idea of the geography of the end of the world. It appeared that the island, though rough-surfaced, and with plenty of irregularities, was in general a high rim of cliffs presented to the sea all around, and big hills behind the cliffs, and then all of the center of the island was lower, turning into gentle plateaus, broken only by low-rolling hills.

Now, as I went inland, until the roar of the sea against the cliffs died and then was lost behind me, I came upon what have to be called the meadows of the Smoking Land. Some of them were sheeted across with hard ice, some were deeply covered with snow; but there were thousands of acres spotted only with ice or snow, and covered with dun-colored growths of herbage and grass.

And it was in a big field of this sort that I first saw the musk-oxen, though long before I had discovered their sign. There were about five hundred of them in the herd, I think, and I expected them at once to form their circle and stand with lowered heads waiting for me to charge. Those are their tactics—to make a wall of horns that will keep off the strongest polar bear in the world. And instinct has planted in their minds the ineradicable certainty that there is no other enemy in the world than things that kill with tooth and paw.

They are grand animals, and they are useful for a meat as good as beef ever was, or better, and they have a length of fine,

woolly coat that makes even the sheep of western Scotland look like naked wretches. Besides that, they can be used for beasts of burden, I know.

So, altogether, it was a good sight to me, when I saw that fine, handsome herd. Five hundred—yes, there were more, many more, for when I came nearer, getting on a little eminence, I could see over the next low ridge another shallow valley dotted over with at least an equal number of the oxen!

It was a splendid sight, but it made me unlimber my rifle. I did not want to do random, reckless murder, but I wanted to get a good crack at some beef. The seals had been kind to me for eight months, I admit, and when a man is hungry, there is plenty of nourishment in the flesh and oil of a seal. Nevertheless, back on my molars and the root of my tongue there was a desire to get the taste of real beef, once more.

It was simple, of course, I walked up, and when, to my amazement, the musk-oxen did not get into their charmed circle, I went close to a fine, plump yearling, and gave it a bullet behind the shoulder.

The herd scattered at the explosion; and my yearling coughed blood, and dropped to its knees. Then it rolled over dead.

I took time to skin it. That much leather was not to be thrown away at the end of nowhere; I had an idea that I could cure it by the heat of a fire, perhaps. Then I cut up the carcass, and I had got about half way through that job when Murder, still harnessed to the sled, became agitated and began to talk to me.

He had a style of conversation all his own, consisting of a series of whimpers, and whinings and muttering that ran up and down a long scale. I knew a lot of his words. I knew whole phrases of his as clearly as though he had spoken them.

Among other things, he could say distinctly, "Look out! Trouble ahead!"

And that was what he said now, as plain as day. "Bad Business! Let's run!"

I looked up and saw the reason why.

The musk-oxen, after the sound of the gun, had gone clumsily running, huddling over the next divide, and now, across the same low ridge, a dozen dogs came pouring, each one the twin of Murder.

WELL, they looked like his twin brothers, all right, but it was perfectly apparent that they also looked like trouble of the blackest sort to him!

The way those dog ran, I guessed that, like their cousin Murder, they might have had some practice in running men for a game of blood to please their masters or themselves. Obviously, I couldn't run fast enough to get away from them, so I got Murder out of his traces in a twinkling, and prepared to use the rifle.

Old Murder played up true blue. First he danced wideward, saying clearly, "Come on! Let's go." But when he saw me standing still, he came skulking back and stood in front of me, and lowered his snaky head.

But the white devils who were charging us did not mind that. They came all the harder and faster, it seemed to me, until I got one of them firmly on a bead, and cracked him in the middle of the skull.

He jumped twenty feet into the air, and came down with a decisive flop, and lay still, while the rest of the dogs split right and left and gave us a wide berth.

Murder, the rascal, turned his head and looked up to me with the biggest, widest, reddest laugh that I ever saw.

The white dogs, taking their distance, sat down on their haunches and lolled out their long red tongues, and obviously seemed to think that although I had the edge, now, their turn would come before long. I wondered whether I ought to drop a few more of them or not, but ammunition was precious—it was lifeblood to me, and I did not want to spend it uselessly. Finally, I decided that I would take the choice cuts of the dead musk-ox, and leave the remnants to draw off the dogs.

But when I was about to go on with my butchering, I saw something that stopped me short. It was a gleam of light over the rim of the hill, and the gleam grew upward into a tall spear, and beside the spear stood a big man well hooded and wrapped in furs. And off to his right and left, in exactly the same manner, grew up two more men. And as I turned, I saw others. A dozen of them, one as like the other, as peas from the same pod, stood motionless in a great circle around me, posted on the higher ground.

They looked like business. They looked

like bad business. Murder lay down and made himself as small as possible at my feet. And I had to cheer myself up by remembering, grimly, that I was carrying a repeating rifle!

## CHAPTER 12

### Kine of the Goddess

**N**OW nine-tenths of my security—repeating rifle or not—slid down out of my heart and departed by way of my toes, for as though at a signal, I saw all of those fellows plant their spears, butts down, leaving the circle of points glistening. While from their shoulders they unslung some very capable looking bows of horn. Each one looked as long as the man who carried it, and the arrows were long, too.

These fellows marched on, closing up the distance evenly around me, until they were all about thirty yards away, and there they paused, twelve of them, with twelve arrows on the string, and their silence, and the bulk of them, and the way they handled those bows and arrows, made me wonder if my cuirass would prove invulnerable now.

Instead, I had used up all the time in between with the sign language. I was not exactly proficient but I knew a good deal about it from my stay in the North, and I had been chattering away with my hands as fast and hard as I could. I had been saying that I was a friend, and that I came in peace, and that I was not on the war-path, and that I was only making a pleasure trip, and that I was shipwrecked—I didn't know any sign for an iceberg—and that my dog was just a pet, and so was I.

But, as I said before, while I hand-talked, they kept marching, and the only gestures they made were made with bows and arrows.

I dropped into the snow, still cursing, and leveled my rifle at the biggest of the lot. I waited, and gusted out a sigh when he suddenly lifted his right hand.

The rest of the circle of bowmen lowered their weapons and stood by, as it were, waiting.

I was pleased. I was more than pleased. But I had sense enough to keep a steady head. I hoped that he was the leader of

this little party, not only from his size, but also because he seemed a little more fluffy in the furs and a little more important in his attitude. There is something about the way a man wears his stomach—in or out—that tells the observer whether he's the king or only the dishwasher.

He dropped that good right hand of his and walked toward me, speaking a language that put tingles up my spine, for it was the same dialect that I had heard from the dead master of Murder. I made out that he was surprised to see me, and that he wondered from what part of the world I came, and why, above all, I had killed one of the sacred cattle, and even more than above all, he was interested in finding out where the devil I got the strange clothes I was wearing!

I got up on one knee, with my rifle at ready, and with the muzzle still pointed at his breast, and in getting up, I managed to survey the rest of the circle. Every man was standing exactly where he had first taken root when my target gave the signal.

He kept on advancing, and I told him as well as I could that though I revered him like a father, yes, even as an uncle, I would nevertheless and most regretfully have to knock a hole through his brain pan if he didn't stop.

I could see that I had learned to speak quite a lot of Esquimau, because he actually came to a halt about ten steps from me.

"What is your name, and from what land have you come, and which tribe of the Esquimau do you call mother?"

"My name is Cassidy," said I, "and I am the son of Mike, who was the son of Bill and the tribe I claim as mother is the American tribe, and there are so many Americans, that when they speak together, the ocean has cold chills and runs back ten steps from the shore."

This was not a joke, apparently, in the Smoking Land. My friend of the big furs nodded his head, gravely, and he said that his name was something or other, entirely unpronounceable, and that he came from a tribe whose wise men darkened the sun with their incantations, and made the sea boil by blowing on it.

I had to admit, to myself, that he had out-boasted me, but aloud, I merely sug-

gested that his people were dealing with a smaller ocean.

He leaned on his bow while he considered me, and when I say that he leaned on his bow, I mean that that bow was so stiff and strong that it did not seem to sag under his weight. It was, in fact, a whale of a bow, and a whale of a man was handling it. I threw a furtive look over my shoulder and saw that his party was still keeping its distance.

"All of these cattle," said he, "are sacred to the goddess and to her priestess. Why have you killed one of them?"

"Because I was hungry," said I.

**T**HIS, finally, touched the northern funny bone. For he actually grinned at me. And for the tenth time since he had come within close range of my eyes, I wondered if the darkness of his skin was due to natural pigment, or simply a coat of lamp black. He had the eye-color of a Nordic—he had the bone and size of one.

"You mean," said he, "that in a dream, it was revealed to you that you might eat of the sacred flesh?"

If that was a hint, I determined to take it. I said, "Of course the thing came to me in a dream. Otherwise, I should sooner have grazed on the grass, like the musk-oxen. Who was I to touch the sacred creatures of a goddess?"

He asked me what sign I had received. I said that the sign I had received was a secret between me and the goddess, because she did not tell everyone in the world what was in her mind. Therefore I could not talk about signs to a man I did not know.

He said that he was the second cousin of a man who was friend of a woman who was an aunt of the priestess, or something to that effect, but I refused to be budged. I said that he could be what he chose, but that still I would have to keep my mouth shut.

After I had finished this little speech, with a strong emphasis, he nodded his head for a good while like one who is considering. What I was considering was that his mustaches were so flourishing and big that he—must have had a good split of white man's blood in him. Native races don't run so much in hair.

And this pair of saber teeth promised a

lot of Caucasian, I thought. What teeth!

He got hold of the ends of his mustaches, and yanked at them like an English Squire, while he considered the points I had been making.

Then he asked me how long I had been upon the way. I said that I had been eight months. He wanted to know if a bird had carried me across the ocean, and I said that I had crossed it on the ice, and with that sled.

He looked at the sled. He opened his eyes to show all the whites. Since I did not choose to tell him about the canvas skin that turned the sled into a real boat, he wanted to know if the sled ran with its narrow runners upon the surface of the water.

I told him that he could see for himself that I was a man of truth, because here I was, and nothing except the sled, what was in it, and the dog, had brought me this far.

It was a pretty neat way of telling a lie, and I was proud of it. And I was still prouder when I saw him nodding his head in the fashion of a wise man who believes strange things that are hidden from the eyes of ordinary folks.

He wanted to know what use there was in the hollow iron stick that I carried.

It pleased me to hear him speak of iron, which is not a natural Esquimau word. It proved to me contact between this people and something later, at least, than the Bronze Age. So I told him that the tube was a magic thing that breathed fire and death, and that if I touched the trigger, he and all of his men would fall dead.

He blinked, but was not too much impressed.

Then, he said, "You mean that this is an arquebus? I have heard of such a thing, and I have seen it, and I know that it scatters death over much ground. But it has a wide mouth, and this mouth is narrow, almost as narrow as the shaft of a spear!"

When I heard him say the word *arquebus*, in English, with a perfectly good accent, I almost dropped on the spot.

It was too much for me. What would *he* know about an arquebus, and who in the name of heaven was *using* one in this year of grace and gracelessness?

And was it not certain that I was one of the first whites ever to reach this Smoking Land? And if certain cautious scientists had already come here to set up an experimental laboratory, what in thunder would they be doing with an arquebus? No, they would have automatic pistols and machine guns. But *arquebus* was unmistakably the word he had used.

I said, finally, that this was not an arquebus. That an arquebus was to my people a thing for laughter, but that this killed like thought and almost as painlessly.

He considered me for a time, after I had said this, and I could see in his eye the blank coldness of a man who is sure that what he is hearing is a vast and glorious lie.

At the same moment, or a shade later, a shadow fell across the tail of my eye. I tried to twist myself around, but I was too late, for a pair of efficient hands laid hold of me and squeezed me into submission.

I TRIED to bank him in the nose with an upward jerk of my head. Then I tried to get him in the ribs with a swing of my elbow. An elbow will do about ten times what a fist can ever manage, but I found that I had spilled myself into all sorts of trouble.

What happened to me was a stranglehold, a toehold, a full nelson, a body scissors, a wrist-and-nose-hold, all at once.

I lay still. If I hadn't, I would have broken myself to bits. I gave myself about ten seconds to survive the various mountains of weight and strength that had been dumped upon me, one after the other.

The giants who had grabbed me disentangled themselves when their lord gave a couple of grunts, and they rose, with me dripping from their hands.

I did not struggle. Nobody wants to struggle when he has just had a hand-to-hand conference with the assembled heavyweight champions of the world.

They had gathered around me waiting for further orders, while the rest of the circle moved in without haste to look me over.

The big man was now planted just before me. He was about fifty, and ran a little to stomach and whiskers. He looked, say, like a Swedish banker out for an

airing on skis during the summer vacation. He was no darker in the skin than I would have been minus eight months of smoke from seal oil flame. He had a lot of jaw and a lot of cheekbone, and he had small, gray-blue eyes, that looked me over judicially.

He asked me, "Of what land are you, stranger? And how have you come to this country?"

I said that I had been trying to tell him that I came from the far South where the sun shone every day of the year, but that I had been led away by unlucky fate and had gone north, and the storms and floating ice had brought me, at last, to the first meal of beef I had had in eight moons.

When I got through, he spent another few minutes looking me over, and then he said, in a rather broad dialect, that seemed to me like a cross between Scotch and Irish brogues, "Wherefore dost thou lie, friend, seeing that a lie eats the tongue that speaks it!"

It fairly flattened me, when I heard English spoken. But *what* English. He put in the "dost thou" and the literary phrasing, as naturally as you please. I gasped at him.

"What I've said is no lie. I've told you the truth. As a matter of fact, I've been through white hell to get this far. I've really been eight months on the ice, and that's not a lie at all."

"Of what race are you?" said the big fellow.

"American," said I.

"American?" said he. "American? That is a country of which I've never heard."

I laughed a little, easily, "Stop kidding," said I. "Or do you want to say that you've never heard of the United States of America?"

"The United States of America? It is a strange name," said he. "And are all the people of that country black?"

"Rub my face with a handful of snow and you'll get down to the white," said I.

And, so help me, that's exactly what he did. He picked up a handful of snow and rubbed my cheeks hard—so hard that he almost froze the flesh to the bone. And then he squinted. What he saw made him nod his head.

"After hot water," said he, "perhaps the color of the skin would be still paler."

"Listen," said I. "You know what happens when a man huddles up to a primus stove for eight whole months!"

"Truly, friend," said he, "There is a certain savor in your speech, though much of it falls incomprehensibly upon my ear." He shrugged as if at the end of his patience. He drew back from me, slowly. "Search this man even to the skin!" he said.

He was obeyed.

In just about ten seconds they turned me out of my clothes, and then, before the bite of that icy air reached my heart, they helped me into them again. By that time they had secured my revolver and my knife, together with a few other trinkets—and the cuirass.

They were amazed to see the whiteness of my body—even though that was shades darker than soap and water should have made it.

After I was dressed once more, they were still excited over the revolver. They wanted to know all about it, and when I explained, their delight knew no bounds, and they cried out, and clapped their hands together, and very nearly did a dance around me. They called it a circular pistol. That was as near as they came to it. But I was rather amazed. Imagine white men, speaking English, who don't know the word *revolver*!

The knife attracted more attention than the revolver, even, and a great many more frowns. It displeased them as much as the revolver had tickled their fancies.

Then the leader pulled out a knife that was the twin brother of my own borrowed super-stiletto. I looked at it a bit grimly. I had been assured by a man who should have known that there was not another piece of steel in the world like that blade! But here was another.

Finally, the chief turned around to me and said, "Whence hadst thou this knife?"

"From a no-good rannahan who tried to shove it between my ribs," said I.

He stared at me, with steady, impersonal eyes. "Murder was done. The murderer fled with this weapon. He was taken, and flung upon the outbound ice of the great gray sea. By what magic power, therefore, didst thou summon this

weapon to thee, and what spell hast thou laid upon it now?"

When he said this, the husky who was holding the knife for the present, dropped it as though it were red hot. It stuck trembling in the ground.

"I'm telling you the truth," said I. "If you want it back, take it. I'd prefer a good bowie anyway. But as for magic and spells—what sort of rot is that to be talking in this day and age?"

"Thou sayest," broke in the chief, "that thou knowest naught of spells and magic?"

"Not a thing!" said I.

"Tell me, stranger, of a strange land, and of a strange race, am I to believe that this weapon—" he held up my revolver—"is not the work of magic?"

"Magic your eye," said I. "That's the product of the Colt Company."

He stared at me dully.

"To say nothing of the knife and the dog," said he, "both of which are known in this land, what sayest thou, stranger, to one who slays and flays the sacred cattle of the goddess?"

"I told you," said I. "I killed a calf because I was hungry. That's the sober truth you were asking for."

He reached out and poked me in the ribs.

"Starvation is far from thee," says he. "And still thou didst venture, though fear of death could not have driven thee! What, then, of the wrath of the goddess?"

"Goddess?" said I. I didn't want to start that all over again.

"Thou knewest her not?" says he. "Thou saidst thou hadst a sign from her. Thou hast journeyed hither, surely, under her protection for what else would bear thee for eight months over the ice? But wherefore should I judge thee, when the priestess herself must give judgment?"

## CHAPTER 13

### The Nameless Mercy

I ASKED him please to forget all this hocus pocus about a goddess, a priestess, and magic, but I talked to ears of stone. They made a guard around me, and marched me forward, with poor Murder hauling the sled along at my heels, and bumping his head in friendly

fashion against my legs from time to time just to let me know that he was there.

And not a soul spoke to me on the way.

I was pretty darned bewildered. First, I tried to believe that this was just a great big masquerade, and they were waiting for me to make a thorough fool of myself, and then they would turn out of their skins, laughing, and introduce themselves as Smith, Jones, and Brown of such and such an exploring party, who had taken to using native weapons to a certain extent because they had run short of ammunition for their rifles.

But something told me that there was no joke about this affair at all. The way the guards marched along, for instance, with one eye fixed on me all the time, and the other eye on their footing, and the handy way in which they kept the points of their spears at my ribs, made me decide that this party was no laughing matter—for me, anyway.

Pretty soon we came to a village. It was not white, Indian, or Esquimau by the look of it. The houses were of a goodish size, and they were built of stone, low and massive; and the streets wound around in crooked lanes, and they were paved! Paved with big cobblestones! They brought us out finally on a big central square.

In the meantime, we had picked up quite a crowd. Both women and children and other men, young and old, swarmed out of the houses and came kiting along, pointing at me and jabbering to one another—and the language they used was—English!

The crowd got so thick that we could hardly get through, and then the chief made a little speech. It was a simple and naïve lie. He merely said that they were braver and bolder than he had expected to find them, for they freely exposed themselves to the sight of a greater enchanter who might blast them, body and soul.

These odd folk took the joke as if it was not a joke at all. The women covered up their faces and ran and the men drew back and bowed their heads, so that they might look at the ground, rather than at me. And some of them held up trinkets of one kind or another, and I heard them calling out prayers to the goddess to avert

from them the evil eye! They were afraid.

That, I thought, was going too far. It was putting the joke on too broad a foundation.

After that, I kept my mind fallow, ready for a new idea to drop into it and bear seed. We marched on through the village, which I was glad to see the end of, and headed straight on for the great smoking mountain, and the big hills at the base of it.

Before long, we came to a well used road. The snow on it was worn slick in spots, and rutted in others, and before we had gone long, we met the strangest rider and the strangest vehicle you ever clapped eyes on. It was Santa Claus with reindeer, beard, and all. All he lacked was the bag of toys on his shoulders.

Pulling the sled were six beautiful reindeer, all of a size—and in the sled was this big old man all wrapped up in furs, with a great white beard flowing down outside them. His face was red, and his eyes were bleary with the wind of the gallop.

He pulled up on the side of the road and watched us pass, and sang out, "What dost thou, Jenkin, son of Smith?"

"Lo, father," says the chief, as gravely as you please, "I bear to the judgement of the priestess a great enchanter, or liar—I know not which—who proclaims himself to have come from a southern land and of a people never before seen. His face is besmudged, but his body is white, and his soul likewise is stained, for he had laid impious hands upon the sacred cattle of the goddess."

"Ha!" says the old fellow. "I shall go along to hear the judgment. This should be a matter of burning, Jenkin."

"I doubt not," says Jenkin. "The magician has walked eight months over the ice of the southern sea, so he says."

"So he says," adds White Beard, "and so I might say that I have walked for eight years over the southern wind, Jenkin, but would you believe me when I said it? Get on with him, or sit here and ride with me, for it is better by far than walking."

Jenkin preferred to walk, however. And on we went, with the old gentleman behind us. He was not alone. Others came, on foot, and then some with big-wheeled

carts, drawn by three or sometimes five musk-oxen.

I paid not so much attention to these, however. I was thinking about something else—what White Beard had said about burning.

Presently I said to one of my guards, "Friend, what'd the old grandfather mean when he talked of burning?"

This fellow turned a round, a rosy face on me and said, "But what else should betide, stranger, to one who profanes the sacred herd? Art thou such a famous enchanter, and hast thou walked so many thousand leagues upon the frozen sea, and the waves thereof, and yet thou knowest not the goddess?"

I looked fairly at him; I looked deeply at him. His face, I thought, was as round as a dumpling, and as red as an apple. There was neither thought nor deceit in him, and if he had any more wit than a potato, I was willing to eat anybody's hat, even a fur one.

And he thought that there was nothing else ahead of me except a burning! That was his idea of the clearest out for me! My heart chilled. There began to be a trembly churning way down inside of me.

Now we came up a gradual grade and toward what seemed to be a gate that opened into the side of a hill, and that worried me again. I had had enough of the insides of hills. I preferred the open air, for that day in my life. But on we went, while the gates grew taller and taller, and pretty soon I could see that those gates were about a hundred feet high, and on each side of the gate lay a sculptured dog, or lion, or some such thing.

We walked on between them, but now our way was blocked by a portcullis.

There it was before us, plain as day—great bars of steel or of glimmering iron that dropped all across the entrance to the cave, and inside the entrance a voice bawled out: "What goes there?"

"Even a friend—Jenkin, son of Smith," said the chief.

"Advance, Jenkin, son of Smith," said the warder, "and speak the word that should be spoken."

Jenkin, son of Smith, walked close to the bars. "Hail to the goddess, the golden one, to her eye which sees all, and to her

ear that hears all, and to her breath, which is the wind for fortune, good and evil."

"It is spoken," says the warder. "And what wouldst thou, Jenkin, son of Smith?"

Jenkin told him. What he told him had to do with me, and I must say that he gave me a bad report. No police sergeant who knows that the suspected man really should go free ever tried to poison the mind of a judge with a hotter speech than Jenkin made about me. I was an infernal enchanter. That was clear, he said, because by my arts and craft, though as I confessed I came from a far land over the seas, I had learned the very language which was current in the land. I could almost pass for an Englishmen, even as they!

Pass for an Englishman—even as they!

English? And what the devil were Englishmen doing living up there close to the Ice Pole?

There was something comforting about that word *English*. It stands for fair play, throughout the world. It stands for a system of laws, and decent justice that cannot be bought. It stands for honor and truth, and a lot of other things that a fellow under arrest appreciates a lot, believe me!

The huge portcullis rose, and with a faint, whining noise that meant electricity, or else I was willing to eat another fur hat, and then I was marched into the jaws of the mountain.

THE hall we entered was a whale. It was all set about with banners, and odds and ends to deck it out, and among other things, I saw a squad of about fifty soldiers, wearing shining steel armor—no question about that bluish sheen of it—and they had basket-hilted swords at their sides, and big daggers to balance them on the opposite hip, and they carried in their hands a thing that looked like what you see in dictionaries under the word *partisan*, or *halberd*—spears, with heavy shafts, and with axes hitched onto the spearhead!

They were dressed in jerkins and doublets, and above their cuirasses, they had big ruffs standing out around their necks, and the ruff of the captain of the guard was made of lace—real lace, and hand made.

He came up to me and looked me over in a cool and arrogant impertinent way. His hair was black, and flowed down in long curls over his steel-clad shoulders. His beard had been dyed a deep crimson; the heels of his high boots were crimson, too. More lace hung down over his long-fingered, delicate hands.

He wore a little, pointed mustache, and as he stood in front of me, he twisted its ends and looked me up and down icily.

"What hast thou here, my good Jenkin?" says he.

"I have here, sir," says Jenkin, "an enchanter most foul, and terrible, and great, with a black heart."

The dandy laughed a little. "A very foul heart indeed," said he, "if it is blacker than his face."

He sketched a gesture airily.

The dude looked me over again, smiling, disdainful. "Art thou a magician, unfortunate wretch?"

"No more than your foot," said I.

He looked down, and turned the fine, pointed toe of his boot this way, and then that.

"No more than my foot?" said he. "Well, well, and well again! My foot is not a magician, it is true, and to this degree there is sense in the saying of the enchanter. Is it true, good Jenkin, that he has laid malicious hands upon the cattle of the goddess, the golden one?"

"It is even so true," said Jenkin, son of Smith, "that with my eyes I saw a carcass flayed, and the running of herd. Furthermore, with an arquebus he laid low one of the dogs of the sacred herd—with an arquebus in itself a work of enchantment, so small and delicate was it,

and fitted even unto the daintiness of thy hands, sir."

"So?" says the captain of the guard.

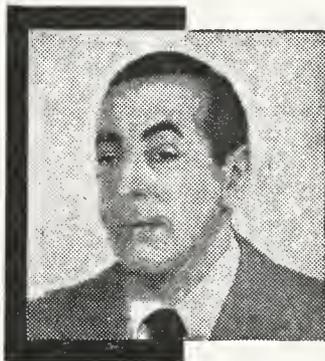
And as he lifted one of his hands, and looked it over, and by the Lord, I saw that the tips of his fingers were stained as red as his heels and his beard!

I guessed that there was a bit of a jibe in what Jenkin had said, but the captain did not see it. He was much too wrapped in self-reverence. But he next said that this was a case that unquestionably required the attention of the priestess herself. And he said, "He must not come foul into the presence of the priestess. Cleanse him, and robe him, and bring him again to me."

This was done.

THE cleansing was a job that I wouldn't like to have repeated. I was taken down a long, narrow tunnel that opened into what appeared to be a series of bathrooms, and the one to which I was brought had hot, steaming water running into a trough twenty feet long, and three broad. I was made to strip, and then a couple of guards stood by with big, stiff-bristled brushes, and dipped the brushes into soft soap, and when I stood in the trough, they scrubbed me. They began at the top of the head, and they finished at the feet, and a hearty job they did. They took off yards of my hide in the process and I was stinging all over before they finished.

After that, a fellow came in with a bowl, a shears, and a knife. He used the bowl to clip off my long, straggling hair just above the ears, and he used the bowl and some soap and the knife to give



## FURRIER NO LONGER WORRIER!

SAN FRANCISCO, Calif.—"I used to wonder which brand to buy," says Sammy Corenson. "But ever since I switched to Calvert, I know. It's the milder, smoother blend for me."

me a shave. I did look more civilized.

Then they gave me a shirt of coarse wool, and they threw over my shoulders a cloak or robe of the same stuff, unbleached and undyed, and I stepped into clumsy slippers.

When this was finished, they brought me back to the captain, and he wrinkled his nose at me, and laughed, and said that I looked less enchanter and more man now, and not such a handsome one at that!

We passed along through another great hall, and another, and so on into one of the craziest, biggest rooms that I ever laid eyes on. The light here was dimmer than in the others through which I had passed; here we came into a holy gloom, so to speak.

In the center of that great hall burned a fire on a sort of raised hearth which I presently saw was merely the lap of a gigantic idol, the most grisly thing that anybody ever conceived. It was the image of a woman in a great robe, and her body seemed to be carved out of white stone, and her robe of black; her face was the face of a sleek, smiling devil.

Around the side of the hall were great pilasters and from these sprang up immense Gothic arches that vaulted across the ceiling. It was something like the interior of a cathedral—not the cold, gray places that one sees today, but such a cathedral as one might have seen centuries ago, all crimson, and gold, and blue, and shining green, though dim, of course, under this light.

We marched past the fire that burned in the central hearth, on the lap of the goddess, and as we went by, I looked into that fire and saw things that no man should see.

On the rims of the ash were little, ghastly piles of half-blackened, half-charred remnants of bones—not of beef or fowl or goat, but just about the right size for human bones. And in the air, I whiffed a scent that would have done credit to a slaughterhouse.

My guards, as they walked by, saluted the fire and the goddess with their halberds, and fetched me onward to a great recessed niche or apse at the end of the room where a smaller fire burned; behind the fire sat a robed, living woman. She was like the goddess, dressed in white

and robed in black, but I saw little of the clothes, for the firelight went upward, flickering, against her face and the mass of golden hair that poured down over her shoulders. I tried to imagine what she might be wearing.

The girl behind the fire lifted her lowered head a little, and she said, "Wherefore art thou come, soldiers of the goddess, and what malefactor has thou brought hither? What evil has he brought with him to this land?"

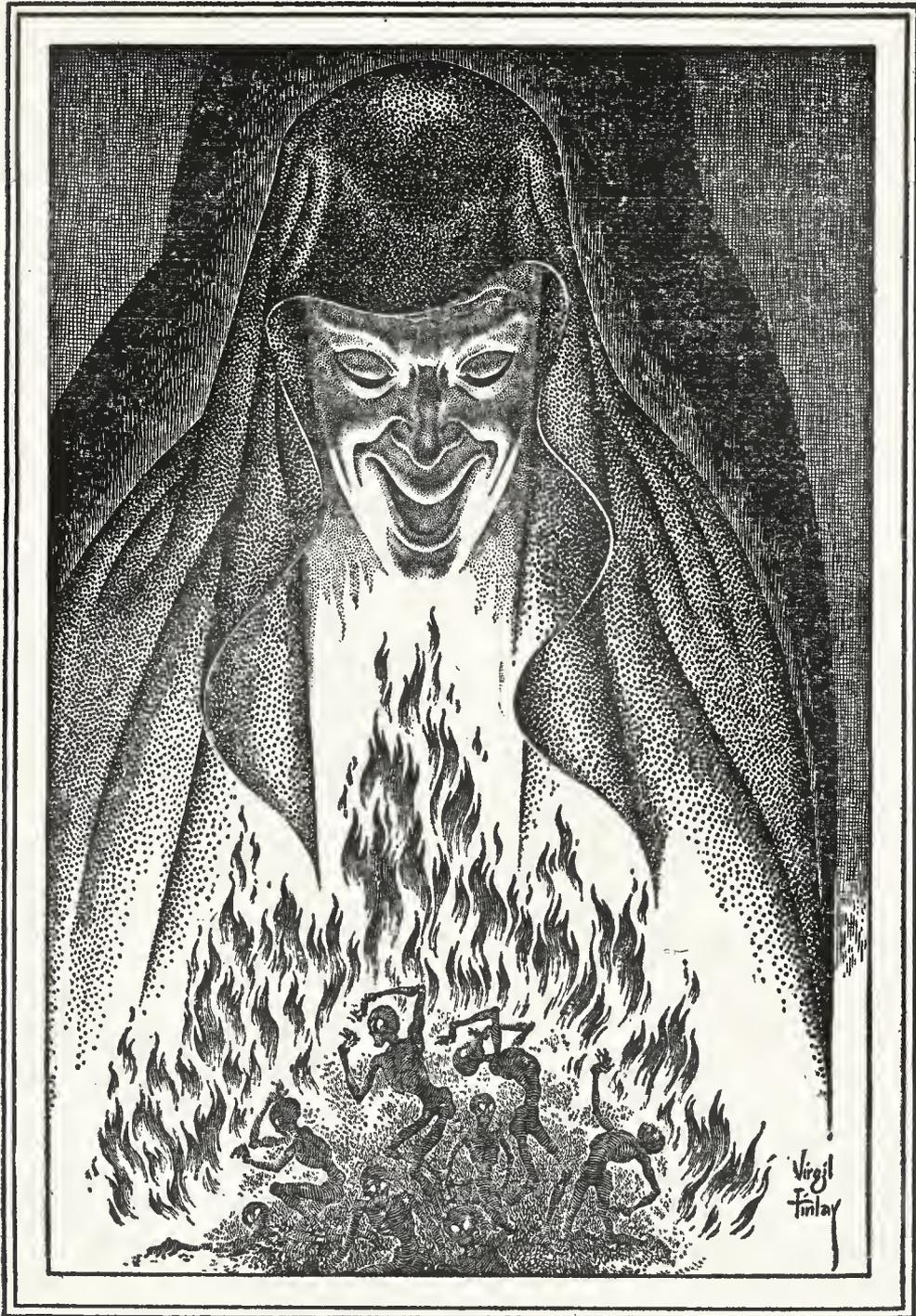
A pair of halberdiers got me on the end of their partizans, so to speak, and pushed me forward. I went with a jump, as though I had been lifted. And then I heard the captain's voice, but so changed that I jerked my head around and looked at him. And I was astonished to see him on his knees. I could not have imagined him kneeling to anything but his love for himself.

One of his hands pressed against the floor; all of them were down like that except two of the halberdiers, who wore black masks, and were standing ready at hand, now, to have at me with the axes on the ends of their spears. The captain of the guard was saying in a very low steady voice:

"Chosen one, stern and pure maiden, in whose heart the wisdom of the goddess flows, and from whose eyes the goddess beholds us, I have brought to thee one who has desecrated the herd of the goddess herself, and who has destroyed one of the sacred dogs that guard the herd. An enchanter he is, and has come from the south, walking over the ice and the waves of the frozen seas, and so great is his magic that it has taught him something of our language, though imperfectly, as thou thyself, dread priestess, shalt hear presently if it be that thou permittest him to speak."

And she said, in a voice that ran like the music of golden, deep strings upon my soul:

"Speak he shall, and have justice, even the justice of the goddess. Thou who standest here, open thy lips, and speak in thy defense unless miserable guilt overwhelms thee, and thou throwest thyself upon the judgment and the mercy of the nameless name! But surely, thou must have something to say."



It was the image of a woman in a black robe; her face was the face of a sleek, smiling devil.

## CHAPTER 14

## Justice of the Goddess

AS YOU can see, it was not only the voice that appealed to me, but it was the words that it spoke.

I took a half step forward, and the hooks of two halberds axes appeared in front of me, ready to jerk me back if I made a jump for the priestess.

"This is all so strange to me," I said, "that I don't know where to begin, except with the truth, and if I tell the truth, it will sound so strange that I don't think you can believe me. But it appears that I am here in danger of my life. Is that true?"

"This is a strange manner of speech," said she, "but it is spoken by a stranger. The singular pronoun becomes the plural on his lips, and that is odd. But it is true that thou art in danger of thy life. How else should it be, seeing that thou hast defiled the herd of the goddess, the nameless name?"

"I understood that at second-hand before," said I, "but I'm glad to hear it with authority. And furthermore, I understand that if I die, I'm to be burned."

"So it is ordained," said the girl. Then she said, "Come nearer, that the fire may strike against thy face."

I stepped right up where the light of the fire could shine well on me and let her have a look. Then she said:

"Do the people of thy country resemble thee, stranger?"

"I pass with the crowd," I answered. "There are some like me."

"That is strange, also," said she, "and even as strange as thy speech, which alters the good English somewhat. But let all be, and proceed with thy defense, however strange."

She was as lovely as carved crystal, as purely beautiful, as lucent—and as cold. Then I took a breath, and hope leaped out of me through the soles of my slippers.

I began at the beginning, and the tale took me two hours. For two mortal hours I talked and talked and talked. I started right at the start, so to speak, and I painted my friendship with Darrell, and told of my cow-punching days, and the days I had spent like a fool chipping rock

with a prospector's hammer and trying to find wealth, and going on to the ranch, and then the dude-ranching.

And so I came to the night at the laboratory, and after that, I built up a pretty good yarn, I think, elaborating on the work that I had done along the trail to the north. I kept right on with every important detail, and some that were not so important, either, and finally I got down to Scanderov, and my departure for the Ice Pole, and I put in my landing, and my walk inland with Murder, and the reaching of the cattle, and the bullet I had put through one of them, and the fact that I had never even heard of the goddess, whom I was entirely prepared to respect from the bottom of my soul. I had decided not to go on with that fool yarn about having been given a sign from the goddess herself.

When I had finished, she looked at me for a while, and then she asked to see the things that had been brought with me.

They brought in my clothes, my revolver, my rifle, my cuirass and my knife. She looked them over, one by one. She asked to see what the revolver was useful for.

The Colt was handed to me. I can't tell you what it meant to have an old friend like that back once more in my hand.

I looked around, feeling half grim and half relieved. And I wondered why I should not shoot down the pair of halberdiers and take my chance with the rest; for the others had been on their knees for all those two hours, and they were wavering back and forth—their bones would ache for the next month, at least. They would be no more capable of running after me than one-legged men.

But I realized that the way was long, and full of labyrinthine windings before I could get out of the cave. And more than that, I trusted that girl, the priestess, in spite of the coldness of her expression. At least, she had listened, still as a stone.

Then I asked for the captain's hat.

It was brought, a beautiful black hat, soft as silk, with a white plume curling down the side of it, a plume that was not one feather, but seemed to have been built up of many bits of down of the softest breast feathers. about

I asked that just one of the halberdiers should stand twenty steps from me and throw the hat into the air. He did it, and I socked a bullet through it, and repeated twice before it hit the floor. It wasn't a hard trick, I never was a great expert with a gun—just a good, average hand on the range. But with a target of that size the trick was easy. Only the speed was important.

I told the halberdier to take the hat to the priestess, and he dropped on his knee and did so.

Well, she turned it, and turned it, and saw the three holes through the fabric, and turned it again, and her face was as grave and still as a stone.

Then she shook her head, and I saw the first sign of a frown. "Three lives might have been taken, and yet the gun was not reloaded," said she.

"There are three more lives still inside this little revolver," I told her, with a touch of pride.

She nodded.

"That is enough," said she. "Take him, and let the fire of the goddess consume him!"

I nearly hit the floor.

Then I shouted. "Justice! Let me have justice! I have spoken the truth, and now I'm to be murdered. Is this justice?"

Her voice was as undisturbed as the music of a running stream. "This that we have seen is magic, and at thy command. And such an enchanter who bearest lives in his hand, controlleth spirits which easily could tell him of the goddess, the nameless name. Therefore thou didst know the cattle of the sacred herd, and willingly didst thou defile them. By thine own hand and out of thine own mouth art thou convicted. Now make haste, and bear him swiftly from me, that the thing may be done that must be done."

"The devil take you," I said, "and all your kind. I see what you are—just a heart of stone. And I've been a fool to believe that there was decency, truth, honor or kindness in you!"

The pair of halberd axes took me in the breast, and pulled me back. I felt my blood start and trickle down my breast as the keen points pricked the skin.

They trussed me like a goat in Mexico. They tied my hands and my feet, and

one of the halberdiers put me over his shoulder and carried me down the hall to the hearth that burned on the lap of the idol.

She was the goddess, I could guess. And I had my guess confirmed, a minute later, when I was put on my feet and found the priestess kowtowing before the big fire.

She from her knees, was saying, "Great goddess, protector and savior, all wise and all merciful, look into the heart of my judgment, which should be your judgment, and confirm it, and accept this sacrifice. Let the evil in this man pass from him through the fire, and his soul, thus purified, pass to thy knees and become thy bondsman forever!"

With this, she turned around, and faced me. And lifted her hand.

At the same time, out of dim nowhere, at the sides of the room, came two fellows all in black robes, and they took hold of me and started to urge me toward the fire.

It's an odd thing that I did not struggle and fight for my life, foolish as that would have been. I didn't even yell, but instead, I stared into the face of the girl.

She was very close to me now, and her beauty was even more patent than before. There was no flaw in her. She looked even more like shining crystal and more removed from me and the ways of men.

And as I looked at her, not believing that such savagery could possibly accompany such a face—such dainty, delicate loveliness—she looked straight back at me, into my eyes, into my heart and soul—without changing a muscle of her face!

And then Fate, or whatever you choose to call it, stepped in and batted out a home run for me, in the ninth inning, with the score one to nothing against me.

I HEARD a scurrying, a scratching of feet far away, rushing nearer, and as those two halberdiers took hold of me, low down, ready to heave me into the fire, up came a white streak, and knocked one of them galley west, sending him staggering off the platform, and then *bump, bump, bump* down the steps, with a yell at every bump, until he hit the floor below.

The other executioner jumped away,

and pulled a knife, and the white streak, which had turned into nothing other than Murder, jumped up and put its big fore-paws on my breast and licked my face.

And I heard the voice of the priestess saying, "Lo, the nameless name speaks, even by the voice of the dumb, and with the foot of the beast may her judgment be written. The man is free, and the folly is ours who judge him!"

The crowd murmured approval.

I was taken at her orders into another room adjoining the great hall.

The guard captain no longer seemed to regard me as a low hound but appeared to be considering the possibility that I might at least be half human. In this room to which we had come there were a number of great wardrobes, and in them, enough clothes to dress an army. But fine clothes they were. There was lace by the thousand yards and bales of furs that a Russian grand duke might have envied.

Yet out of the whole lot, there was nothing I could feel at home in. I was offered my pick, and I said that I didn't care.

So the young-dandy captain of the guard began to select things that touched his own fancy and didn't see at all with mine.

So I picked out for myself a big hat of a black stuff that looked like velvet, with a wide, flopping brim curling up at one side, fastened by a pin with a reddish-brown medallion. And through the loop of the brim, ran a plume that *was* a plume—about a yard long, snowy white and shining, and like the captain's, composed of thousands of downy small feathers, worked with wonderful patience and art into one splashy big one.

I got me a pair of square-toed shoes that were a nice fit and they were plain and easy and sported a pair of big garbet buckles that I liked the look of.

Then I had long blue hose, softer and thinner than silk. I began to get reckless. Those stockings fastened with wide garters under the knee, and the garters that Smoky Cassidy picked out were set with sapphires, thank you.

Then I got a pair of trousers about plum color, or the same velvety stuff as the hat.

After this, I had to have a shirt, and I picked one out that had enough lace and handwork on it to be used as an altar cloth, the sort of an altar that they have in a great cathedral, with golden candlesticks burning around here and there, and plenty of incense drifting in the air.

There was a sort of smell of incense, I thought, about this same shirt, and when I got it on, and saw the huge ruff standing out around my neck, and the waterfalls of lace that spilled down, cool and showery, around my wrists, I wondered what laundress would ever dare to tackle such a job except with prayers!

But the shirt was not the only trick to be turned. No, not at all, for the crowning glory was a coat, and such a coat you never saw off the stage, and *on* a stage it would have been a fake. This was of the same velvety cloth, woven to a sheen, and it had big square cuffs stiffened with golden fretwork. The buttons were made of emeralds, and the color of the coat was yellow. No, yellow, was not the word for it. But you know the color of an apricot when it is dead ripe, and the skin is blooming between the pollen-shade and a blush?

Well, that was the color of my coat, and when I put it on I thought that I was finished, but the captain of the guard asked me not to be ridiculous, what about a sword?

I said that a sword was a handy idea. So he brought out about two hundred swords for me to look at. Some of them were basket-hilted, and some of them had plain iron cross-pieces to guard the hand, and there were rounded steel bells, too, to save your knuckles from a slice or a stab. Some of the blades were tapering and narrow as an ice-pick, though all were double-edged; and some of them were broad and heavy enough to be used for the cleaving of anvils; and besides these straight ones, there were curved blades, wide and heavy, with a fine sweep to them.

I HAD been around Central America enough to learn a little about machete work—not to boast; I had spent hundreds of hours' exercise with the heavy, blunt knives that they use there for fencing. The machete will cut down the sugar cane

the way a sickle nips through a swathe of tender grass. The natives have worked out a system of machete play that's almost as elaborate and scientific as small-sword fencing, and I had had masters to teach me—eager and enthusiastic teachers, too. They collected their tuition fees in scoring points on me, and when you're nicked on the head, or chopped on the arm, or rammed in the stomach, or whacked on the legs by a free swinging machete, even though the blade is dull, it has a certain meaning. After you come to, you remember that wallop, and you lie awake at night planning how to parry it, and get in a home crack in return.

So, after three years of slaving around there in Central America, I got so that I gave my teachers more than they sent me, and the mean beggars used to send far and wide to ring in celebrated experts on me, so that they could stand about and embrace their skinny stomachs while they bowed with laughter. However, I got so that I could handle the experts, too, and at about that time, I left the land of malaria and yellow fever and came back to the more harmless and hard, cleaner biting mosquitoes of my native cow range.

I put in all of this digression so that you will understand how it came about that when I saw a big scimitar with a blade like a bit carved out of the sky, and with a hilt toughened and roughened with tiny rubies, I grabbed it, and tried its beautiful balance, and slashed the air once or twice, and said that it would do.

The captain said that he thought so, too. For his own part, he said that he preferred a sword with a straighter point, but a curved blade was handier for carving through armor. Some day he would be enchanted to have a few friendly passes with me, fencing the straight edge against the curve.

Well, I told him that that was a pleasure that I was looking forward to, and I meant it.

Now that I was fixed up as far as this, I thought that enough had been done, but while I was admiring myself in a long mirror, and turning this way and that, and sticking my chest out, and pulling my stomach in, and resting my hand on the hilt of my new sword, along came the captain of the guard, again, with a big

black wig in his hand which he offered to me.

I could not feel comfortable, said he, with my head so naked!

So I gave an embarrassed laugh, or one that I hoped would sound that way, and popped that wig on my head.

I got it wrong side out, but when it was finally settled, and smoothed and brushed out, it was the finest wig that you ever saw, and it made a lot of difference in me. The glossy black curls came down over my shoulders, and swished and swished around whenever I turned my head.

Yes, I thought that the wig set off everything very well, and I was pleased with myself, to be frank. So was the captain. He backed off and looked at me out of narrowed eyes, and then he burst out:

"Truly, sir, though clothes be not the man, the pleasant seeming of gentility appeareth through them, and the well born are not easily mistaken!"

The more he studied me, the more he seemed to like me, finding new points to admire with every flick of his eyes.

"I cannot but feel, sir," he admitted at last, "that I misjudged you before."

For the first time I really agreed with the captain. I saw that he was a fellow of more penetration than I had guessed before this, and in fact, he warmed my heart a good deal. I began to think that we might get on together in spite of his red beard and redder heels.

When I was all fixed up, he led me back to see the priestess, and as I stepped along, I listened to the rustling of my clothes, and the clinking of my sword in its scabbard, and the music of the golden chain that hitched the scabbard to my belt and above all the whisper of the silk against my ear to be saying:

"Smoky Cassidy, for the first time you're really looking yourself!"

Then the captain brought me to a room that was not a room at all, at first glance—and in it I saw the princess once more.

## CHAPTER 15

### Men of the Mountain

THIS room was circular, and about fifty feet across, and the reason why it didn't look like a room at all was because it was domed across with glass,

so that it seemed a tiny bit of earth, with a little sky arched over it.

A bit of earth? A bit of paradise, I should have said, because I never saw such a garden. The temperature was as of mid-May, and such flowers as I never had seen were blooming around, here and there, in rows and banks and clusters—neither rose nor violet, nor marguerite, but things which looked first cousins to them crowded the garden, and in the center there was a fountain throwing up its head bravely and filling the place with music. I could see that this was a regular conservatory, where the most was made of the feeble Arctic sunlight.

The flowers were all the fairer in that dim, soft glow.

But flowers and fountains could not take my eye. Not for long, at least. I was too interested in the human things that I saw and heard. As for the hearing, there was the tinkling sound of an instrument like a guitar, but much more silver-pure in sound, and to that accompaniment a girl's voice was singing—not to the tune that you have heard—Shakespeare's lyric:

*Who is Sylvia, what is she  
That all our swains commend her?*

I stood like a stone to the ending of the song, hardly hearing a whisper of it toward the finish, but filling up my eyes with the golden girl, the priestess of the nameless name, according to their own lingo.

She was not the singer. No, that was done by a lass as dark as my priestess was bright, and she was dressed not in simply flowing robes, like the other, but all lace and frills and spangles and what-nots. Her hair was combed a foot high on her head, and it was powdered over and shining with jewels, or what looked like jewels.

If you like a brunette, she was pretty—she was mighty pretty. But to me, just then, she was no more than a star that has the bad luck to be standing shoulder to shoulder with the moon.

"Doth it please thee?" said the dark one, as she finished.

"It is delightful," said the priestess. "But now wait a moment, Alice, before thou singest again. The stranger cometh."

The captain of the guard gave me a nudge, just then, so I marched forward, and fetched off my hat to make the best bow that I ever got out of my system, but the damned wig stuck to the hat, and when I brought it off with a great flourish, by thunder, the wig came along with the hat, and there was I, blinking at the roar of laughter.

The girl, Alice's, was the loudest voice. The captain of the guard was gurgling his own amusement a bit towards the back of his throat but Alice laughed fit to kill.

Only the priestess kept her eyes level and gravely upon me, and there was only a faint smile on her lips, and that smile went out almost at once, and left her cold and pale and serene and shining, as always, with that inward light.

"Peace, Alice, peace!" said she gently. "I vow thou art rude and saucy to our guest."

"I have human ribs that can be tickled, Sylvia," said the girl, "I am not a grave and patient monster, like thee."

"Hush, Alice," said the priestess, while I conned that name back and forth in my mind, and decided that Sylvia was the right name. It was the one that I would have picked out myself to give her!

The captain picked up my fallen wig and offered it to me, but suddenly I was tired of all my splendor, as tired as a man will suddenly get of a fine-looking horse that gives him a fall. And I stuffed the wig into my pocket, and cursed it silently, and stuck out my chin and gritted my teeth, and hoped for trouble.

Sylvia said to me, "Thou art content, oh my friend, with what justice the goddess hath meted unto thee?"

I SAID that I was content. I was more than content. I wanted to thank her in person for what she had done for me. And at this, her eyebrows climbed a little and her lovely eyes opened wide at me, and she said:

"Alas, what have I done? I have no will but that of the nameless name, and I have nothing to give, saving her gifts. In all matters that concern her sacred will, her voice possesses my throat. Give no thanks to me, but to her, the nameless one!"

Oh, she said it as gravely as you please,

while I rested my chin on my knuckles and looked her over, and realized that whatever bunkum there might be in this religion of hers, as far as she was concerned, it was the pure quill.

Whatever else might be, this nameless goddess, was, to Sylvia, the real, true force of life, her commands embraced the whole of justice, and there was no limit to her wisdom.

All this shone in Sylvia's clear and lovely eyes; it was implicit in the little pause that followed her words.

Then she went on to say that since there had been, as she thought, a heavenly intervention to save me, she believed all of the story I had told her, although it was so strange that, to use her own expression, the "exceeding marvel and passing wonder" of it still staggered her.

As for Darrell, in short, she knew nothing about him, but if he were in the land the men of the mountain would know.

I asked her who the men of the mountain might be, and she said, "Nay, stranger, that has not been revealed to me, and to none other, as I well think, saving to those wise men themselves. But they are the friends of the goddess and they dwell apart, even in the heart of the mountain, and on its lofty shoulders. I have sent unto them to have knowledge of thy friend. Even in the name of the goddess I have sent, and the answer surely will not be long. Wilt thou sit and wait? And thou, also, the captain of the guard?"

The captain got off a bow that made me sick with envy, and thanked her, but he said that it was not for him to sit in such a presence.

I envied the speech as much as I envied the bow, but since I was already lowering myself onto a bench, I finished the job and sat down, and felt a bit hot in the face.

Sylvia smiled at me, though, in a way to make me feel more comfortable.

However, the girl Alice came right over and sat down beside me, and she said, "Truly, my friend, curiosity is a wolf that consumes me when I hear thy speech intoned through thy nose, and I would give the rings from my fingers to know more of the southern land from which thou comest."

Her voice had a gay, lilting ring tinged with a mockery that was light and a little

stinging. She was sparkling with gaiety.

"If you give me some time and half an ear," said I, "you can keep your rings and hear all about it."

She looked me up and down and laughed in a half friendly and half mocking manner. "Sylvia," she said, "it is as thou hast said. There is a flavor and a smack of life in his speech. Thou comest from a great land and a great people, dost thou not?"

"The greatest in the world, bar none," said I.

"Ah? The greatest?" said she. And she lifted her brows at me.

"Surely, Alice, a man's country is ever the best in his eyes, and his people are the greatest!"

"But tell me nevertheless," said Alice, "is thy land so wide as ours, and are thy mountains as great as the smoking mountains?"

I said, "You could put three or four dozen little islands like this in a coat pocket of that country of mine."

"Ah?" said she, blinking. "And is it as fair?"

I looked around me. "Do you like this garden?" said I.

"It is a miracle of beauty," said she, "for it was made by the men of the mountain. Hast thou aught to match it in thy kingdom?"

"THE whole country, once or twice a year, is like this little garden," I told her. "No man makes it beautiful, but the sun and the rain do it for them. The flowers jump up under your feet, and the sweetness of them fills the wind, I tell you! Stretch out this garden to fill a valley a hundred miles long, all paved with color, and set some good big blue mountains in the distance, and round off things with a blue sky, and a few white puffs of clouds, here and there, and you have an idea of a little scene that I've looked at not once, but a good many times!"

She looked me fairly in the eye and didn't say a word, but I knew that she was telling herself that I was one of the biggest and clumsiest liars in the whole world.

Sylvia seemed disturbed. She said in her gentle voice, for everything about her

was golden, "To the traveler, all that he has left seemeth fair. And the eye of the mind is very kind, Alice, when it looks back upon the homeland."

"Well," said Alice, "I came to be amused, and I am amused, indeed!"

"You think that I'm lying faster than a clock ticks," said I, "but that's always the way. If I wanted to lie to you about my country, I'd paint it down, not up. I know that the truth about it is too big for you to swallow."

"Like a poet, Sylvia," said the girl, "he speaks of truth as a thing to swallow. Perhaps thou wouldst find it heavy and hard of digestion, sir!"

And she laughed at me. She was a saucy minx, but I liked her. She made a free fight of a conversation, and I like that, too. It's a great deal better to be damned in the open than behind your back. I could see that she would give me a signed opinion of myself before I had been with her very long.

Well, I was ready to try to shift the talk and to bring in that lovely, gentle, patient Sylvia, when in came a messenger on the run, a slim, handsome slip of a boy in hiplength tights, and a puff around the hips, and a brush of red curls, and a hat with a feather in it stuck on one side. He dropped to his knee and gave Sylvia a biggish fold of what looked like the sheen and the stiffness of old parchment, to my eye.

There was a big seal on it, and the girl stood up and raised the parchment in both her hands, and said:

"In the name of the goddess, the nameless!" Then she sat down and broke the seal, and read what was inside, and shook her head. After that, she looked up at me, and sighed.

"Thou hast come far," she said.

I nodded, on fire with eagerness.

"And thou hast come for the sake of a friend?"

"Yes," said I. "What about Darrell?"

For a moment, she had no answer to give me. Her face was troubled and she could not find words to say. I saw all this, and waited with fear tugging at my heart.

She read out loud:

*"Thou wilt say to the stranger that what he would find may be found, but*

*that the way to it leads by the Fountain of Life."*

And she dropped the parchment into her lap and sat there taking compassion on me with her gentle eyes.

## CHAPTER 16

### The Fountain of Life

THE Fountain of Life!" muttered the captain of the guard, with a nervous awe in his voice.

"The Fountain of Life!" Alice gasped, losing her pertness for the first time.

"It turns out that I'm right, and that Darrell is here," I said. "I don't care where the trail goes, because I'm taking it. If you'll tell me where it begins, I'll try to finish it off!"

"Wilt thou attempt it?" says Sylvia.

"He never has seen the Fountain," said Alice, "or the way that leads by it. Otherwise, his heart would surely shrink and wither at the thought of such a thing."

"Nay, Alice," said the priestess, "for friendship is a mighty thing, and it flies to the stars, and anon it reaches to the center of the earth. Thou shalt behold the way, and I myself shall show it to thee. Alice, wilt thou come?"

The pert Alice shook her head until her fancy headdress tinkled like small bells. "I have seen it once," said she, "as we all must do, and once is enough for my spirit. The horrid dream of it follows me by night. I have seen the Fountain of Life, and one sight of it is enough. Wilt thou go down willingly, even to the entrance to the monstrous place, Sylvia?"

"Behold, my will is even the will of the goddess," said Sylvia, "and I feel that she leadeth me now."

So she stood up, and we left Alice behind us in the garden, still calling after Sylvia, imploring her not to be rash; but the priestess was as calm and steady as a statue.

We had for an escort on the beginning of this strange journey—the strangest, surely, that ever a man could make—two pairs of halberdiers, led by the gallant captain. We marched by long, descending chambers, halls, and narrow corridors, sometimes along inclines, sometimes over interminable flights of steps carved in the

naked rock, until we had gone down to such a depth that the temperature increased perceptibly, and a warm reek of moisture was standing out on the walls, and the lantern light gleamed weirdly along the corridors.

Finally we reached a great vaulted room in which there were a dozen soldiers, scantily clad because of the heat.

They made a scampering to cover themselves when the priestess came in, but her straightforward eyes did not so much as glance at them. To a gray-headed man whose gleaming sword hilt seemed to pronounce him a gentleman, she said:

"There is one comes who would look at the Fountain of Life, and the way that goes beside it. Therefore, let the door be opened!"

The gray beard gave me a long, bewildered look, and then he bowed to Sylvia and said that the thing should be done. He declared, though, that it was a bad time.

He had no sooner said it, than we heard an explosion that shook the floor under us, a vast and muffled sound that roared behind the thick walls of stone.

THE gray beard, who had turned away, came back and asked if Sylvia still wanted the thing done. And she smiled at him gently.

"Thou knowest well," said she, "in whose name I come."

"I know well," said he, solemnly. Going back to a corner of the room, he pulled on a lever that thrust up out of the floor. I heard a click and a grinding, as though great bolts were drawing. He pulled several more levers, and now I saw a great section of the wall yawning outward, turning on a pivot.

A gap perhaps ten feet high allowed a tide of hot air to pour out at us. And I could gaze into an enormous enclosure, where the red of firelight played, wavering up and down. It was like looking into a furnace where the fires have been banked.

"There is the Fountain of Life," said Sylvia, pointing.

And, as she spoke, looking far down into the abyss I saw a white fountain of fire rise, and stand trembling, throwing off incredible floods of light before it broke

at the neck and fell in a brilliant rushing of luminous drops.

A faint groan came from the other men in the room. I wanted to groan, myself, but my voice was frozen in the bottom of my throat, and my hair was lifting on my head.

"There is the way," said Sylvia, who was totally unperturbed. "There is the way—running to the right, along the cliff. You may follow its winding with your eye, from this point. And when you come to the sharp turn, then you will see it extending further, toward another portal, like this, with what seem to be great columns standing before it. This is the entrance to the dwelling of the men of the mountain, the seers and the wise ones who govern the land under the will of the goddess. Beside it is a metal shield, sunk in the rock. Strike against this, and the door will presently be opened, and admit you. Go, therefore, my friend, while the way is open!"

I went on to the doorway, and one step through it along the path which she had pointed out, but there my feet stuck to the rock and would not budge, for looking down, I saw such a sight as staggered my mind.

Imagine a caldron a thousand feet deep, scummed over with the dross of lead, but churned from beneath, and writhing and twisting as the liquid that fills it boils, and now and again, where the scum is broken, there is the red glow of molten metal, or the white gleam of intense fire!

That was what I was looking down into, and a horrible, almost irresistible desire took me by the throat to leap from the verge of the cliff and throw myself into that boiling pot.

I knew well enough what it was. I had come to the Smoking Land, and here was the source of the smoke! It was literally the bowels of the volcano that I was looking into; and the reeking fumes of phosphorus and sulphur filled the air, and would have stifled me, except that they had overhead a free outlet, and were expelled upward by a mighty draft of heat. For I could see the lips of the crater high up, sometimes lost in the clouds of vapor, and sometimes revealed as the fires broke from the surface of the caldron.

I could not go forward along that

frightful path. At any moment, another great explosion might fill the interior of the pit with thunders and with liquid fires.

I wondered about the wisdom of the "wise men" who lived next door to a volcano!

Then I heard a voice say close to my ear—for there was a continual deep roaring and growling from the liquid mass beneath me, "Brother, all that is strange seems terrible. Come forward after me, and thou wilt find the path an easy one!"

As she said this, Sylvia walked straight past me into the fire-lit gloom of that hell!

Shame and pity and admiration—all worked to dissolve my fear for a moment, and I ran forward after her. I reached her and touched her arm.

"Go back! Go back, Sylvia!" I shouted in her ear.

She said, calmly, "All is as the goddess wills it. And she wills that I go forward with you to the limits of my domain."

With that, she turned and went straight forward, again, and I followed her not because I wanted to go, but simply because I could not be outfaced by the courage of a mere girl like her! She continued on.

And the heat increased around us. I never have felt such a terrible blast of it, burning and biting. She flung a fold of her cloak about her head, and I tore off my coat and used it similarly as a shield against the heat. But no shield could help very much.

To make things worse, one moment we were stumbling over heaps of cinders, and the next, the narrow ridge almost pinched out, and we were walking on a ledge hardly half a yard in width.

I had to look down to make sure of my footing, and when I looked down, I saw the frightful vitals of the mountain writhing and throwing up crimson arms to me.

I hate to think of that moment; I hate still worse to think of the instant when, just as the path widened, I stumbled on a rolling, loose bit of rock, and fell flat, spinning over and over, until I was on the edge of the abyss.

I was on the edge, and I was falling—and then I felt the grip of the girl on me. She had thrown herself on her knees, and now I lay on the brink of the precipice

with a thousand feet of nameless horror beneath me, and saw her holding her grip, though the momentum of my fall was toppling her forward.

Yes, she had committed herself utterly to the will of the goddess, that much was clear, and in another instant we both would have hurtled down into that red inferno.

But by ounces the scale turned in our favor, and I felt the strain relieved as I recovered a knee grip of the rim of the ledge, and then found a hand hold, and scrambled back to safety.

What followed, I hate to think about. It makes me bow my head and shudder. But I'll tell the truth. I got back to safety on my hands and knees, and I caught hold of the priestess and hid my frightend face in her cloak like a panic-stricken child!

Yes, and she put her hand on my head and leaned over and spoke comfort in my ear, and gave me her strong, slender hand, and helped me back to my cowardly feet!

So, hardly knowing what I did or where I was going, because fear had taken the strength out of my knees and the wits out of my head, with my shaking hand upon her shoulder, I went along that frightful cliff with her, and turned the corner of the bayss, and saw straight ahead, perhaps a hundred yards away, a great, columned portal just as the priestess had said that I should.

It looked to me like the entrance into hell!

## CHAPTER 17

### The White Fire

**W**ELL, I was finally steadied on my feet by some sense of shame and the hand and voice of the girl. And it seemed to me that I scarcely cared what happened then; I would be willing to jump straight into the arms of death, if necessary, to keep from showing my lack of nerve again.

When I stood up I found that things were worse than ever. In the great pit below, I heard a series of muffled explosions, and with each of these explosions there was an upward leaping of a peculiar, greenish light; followed by the showering and splashing sound as of water falling



The whole interior of the volcano was a roaring and flaming mass. . . .

into water—except that I knew that the liquid in this case was molten rock and metals!

At the same time, the heat was trebled, and the air was thick with the stink of sulphur.

I looked back now toward the door from which we had come, but it was closed, and I had a frightful stifling feeling, as though he had been thrust into an oven and left to bake. And bake we would have, if we had lingered. The heat was so great that it seemed to lift the lids of the eyes and pry under them against the nerves of the eyeballs.

It was perfectly plain that the smoking mountain was ready for something more than smoke. And the girl and I ran until we were hardly a dozen steps from the second gate.

Then she touched my arm, and holding out her hand she pointed.

"Thou seest the shield," said she; "strike on it, and the door will instantly open, even if the liquid fire were flowing at that moment outside it. As for me, I must go back. This door is forbidden to me!"

Through the fold of cloth that covered my mouth to shut out the fumes, I shouted at her. "You can't go back! You've got to come on with me, or else I've got to go back with you. I can't let you be alone!"

I saw enough of her face to notice the calm smile on it. She simply said, "Oh, my friend, I cannot be alone. The goddess is with me to the end. Farewell!"

Now, as she said this, and while I said to myself that she was the bravest creature in the world, the same fountain of gleaming white which I had seen when I first looked into the crater now burst upward again, and from the same spot. It scattered, dissolved in overmastering brilliancy all the green glow, and shooting upward to a prodigious height, it thrust its head into the very top of the crater, filling it from lip to lip, while streams and showers more brilliant than diamonds fell back, and great masses dropped, with furling rims of bluish smoke here and there about them.

I felt a drop of liquid on my forehead, and it burned to the bone. It was like an electric shock. And I saw fire rain on Sylvia's clothes, and the curling of flame

as it shot up. The heat seemed much worse.

But, in this moment, as she said good-by to me, she turned and started to walk straight back along the ridge—yes, although the path was showered over by the terrible rain of that white fire, which every moment grew thicker, so that the whole interior of the volcano was a roaring and flaring mass of white flame, a thing to be dreamed of, and never truly conceived even in a dream. Vast forms seemed to be leaping and whirling in it, and voices thundered and shouted.

It might be the purpose of the priestess, Sylvia, to trust the goddess and go straight back the way that she had come, but I could not let her do that. I caught up with her in a bound, and grabbed her up, burning clothes and all.

She resisted. She put her hands against my face and thrust me away. Her voice came thin and high and clear to me. "Let me go! To pass that gate is death for me! Let me go!"

I heard the words, but they had no meaning to me.

I mean to say, there was too much else going on, and the one thing that mattered was to get the pair of us out of the touch of that ocean of liquid fire.

And I reached the shield and beat on it like a madman. It seemed to me, as I turned my back on the towering Fountain of Life, that the thing bloomed greater behind me, and reached for me with millions of hands.

For only one thing could I be grateful, and this was that Sylvia no longer struggled to get away. Instead, she lay limply against me, her head fallen to the side—she had fainted.

**R**EASON enough for that, of course, but to see her so stupefied me almost more than the fire that was roaring around me.

The heat caught me on the back of the head and the neck and filled my brain with flaring red—and then the door was no longer a solid wall before me. Hands caught at me, and snatched me in along with Sylvia. And the great rock panel closed with a crash. My poor head was still spinning; and the frightful heat did not seem to disappear suddenly, but rather it retreated in waves.

In the meantime, I found myself in a great hall, very much like that which had led to the entrance to the crater on the farther side of it. There were a score of men here all in vast turmoil. They were pointing at me, and they were jabbering about the priestess.

Now, then, as Sylvia recovered her senses and stood up from the chair into which she had fallen, a pair of big guards in steel cuirasses caught her, one by each arm, and hurried her off toward the door. They were ejecting her. She had to go back by the way she had come, and she had to go at once!

When I thought of that inferno outside the wall, and the fire that was showering upon the ledge over which we had walked, I turned sick. I ran and got in front of the men and the girl.

She was stepping along as calmly as you please, and her head was high, and her look was perfectly steady. I could not even see that her face was very pale.

I held up my hand and stopped them. "Do you realize," I shouted at them, "what it would be? Murder! I tell you, it would be murder! No goddess, nothing else that you believe in could keep her alive for one minute out there!"

"Answer him, lady," said one of the guards.

And she said to me, "Do you doubt her power, when she has laid her own finger on your forehead and marked you for her own? How else could you have walked through the fire, except by her permission? And if I am worthy, I shall return unharmed even through the heart of the flame!"

As she finished this magnificent balderdash, the two guards nodded in solemn agreement.

"Let the door be opened!" one of them said. "Pull the levers, Ralph!"

"You infernal murderers!" I shouted, and grabbed my saber out of its scabbard.

I wanted to carve their heads to the chin, and I was too dizzy to realize the number of hands that were against me. Two or three caught me from behind and jammed me back against the wall with enough force to knock half the wind out of my lungs. At the same time the door to the crater slid open.

It was like opening the door to a fur-

nace. The heat that thrust into the room struck through my clothes as though they had been tissue paper, and seared my skin. I could hardly see the serene face of that girl as she walked forward was a dreamed vision.

The frightful blast had literally knocked her escort back on his heels, but Sylvia went straight forward, with a smile, and her head held high, into the crematory. One instant more, and there would be nothing left of her but an ash flinging about and dissolving in that accursed Fountain of Life, as they chose to call it.

But then a voice shouted loudly, in command, and instantly the door slid across the gap and closed the white fire away from my aching eyes.

I tried to shout, but all that came from my throat was a babbling groan. My body went limp, and I felt the sagging of my weight as the two guards held me up.

Then, like a womanish fool, I fainted.

I CAME to looking up at an arched ceiling, coffered and carved in the most elaborate fashion, with three Gothic liernes

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springing from three corners of the oddly shaped little chamber and meeting in a rosette in the centre of the ceiling.

Then I was aware of a bandage that had been fitted around my forehead, and of the sting of the wound under it, and of twenty other burning places where the fire had cut through to my flesh. I was feverish and cold, at the same time. And I was still trembling a good deal.

"He lives!" said a woman's voice.

"He was marked for life by the goddess," said another.

I turned my head and saw a pair of old women close beside the bed. They were huddled up in what looked like Mother Hubbards; they had white neckerchiefs done about their shoulders, little white three-cornered hats on their heads, like pictures I had seen of sixteenth or seventeenth century village women. I liked their faces. They looked wise and calm as only old women can look. No man ever reads through such a book of experience as a woman comes to know. The print is too fine for man's grosser eyes.

When they saw me turn my head, one of them came up still closer and asked me how I was. I said that I was well enough, and I wanted to know where the girl could be. At this they both looked dark and shook their heads.

They were so exceedingly gloomy about it that I sat up at once and repeated my question. They only shook their heads again.

Said the older of the two, "Thou knowest that the will of the goddess must be accomplished. She hath delivered her priestess through the forbidden gate. Surely death must follow."

I had gooseflesh from head to foot when I heard this. "But look here," said I, "you don't mean that they'll throw her into the crater of the volcano? They wouldn't do that!"

One of the dames smiled a little at my simplicity. "Truly, if the goddess would have taken her by fire, with her own terrible hand she would have seized her and made her her own. But instead, she delivered her over to the hands of men, and sent her through the forbidden door, and robbed her of her senses."

"Yes," said the other old woman, "and laid her finger upon your forehead, that

every man might know that you were her messenger. There was never a manifestation of her will more direct than this!"

I stared at the pair of them. "Exactly what will happen to Sylvia?" said I.

"What should happen to her except the headsman's ax?" said the oldest woman. "Now you are better, taste this cup. It will give you sudden strength and lighten your heart."

With that she held out a goblet of glass of the finest rock crystal. Crystal, I should have said, by the weight of it, and I looked into a rich, dark red liquid that had faint sparklings of light in it.

The fragrance of it filled the room; but I was not of a mind to be drinking liquors when there was murder in the air—murder planned for Sylvia. I got to my feet, forgetting my burns and other aches and pains.

There was no window in this room, and yet a current of cool sweet air blew lightly against my face. I had been lying on a long divan, or couch, and opposite me there was a stately four-poster, draped with rich and tasseled curtains that had the sheen of velvet. They were blue and red, and handsome enough for a king to sleep behind.

A very thick carpet covered the floor, and made footfalls silent, and in the center of the room was a table on which lay all of my belongings that had been taken from me when I first arrived in the mountain. There was my good old Colt's, and the long stiletto-like knife, and there were even my sooty, travel worn furs, and my little heap of ammunition. Not many bullets, but enough to count in some pinch, perhaps. I stared at them wonderingly trying to decide how they got there. At the order of the mountain men when I had laid off my things? Probably. Apparently little happened on the island that the mountain men were unaware of.

I took in these quarters and decided that if they had been assigned for my use, I was being very handsomely treated. However, I wanted to get the frightful thought of a judicial murder out of my mind. I was seeing Sylvia led up to a block, with her hands tied behind her, and a black mask tied across her brave, patient face. I could see her still smiling, as she had smiled when she stepped for-

ward to enter the crater. It was too awful—I had to do something.

"This thing has got to be stopped," I shouted. "I've got to get to someone in authority. I've got to tell him what actually happened. You hear me? Don't stand there like a pair of blithering idiots. Tell me what I'm to do! I can't stand here while Sylvia is slaughtered like an ox. I owe her my life!"

One of these bland nitwits said to me with the calmest of smiles: "It was the goddess who saved thee, my son; for what power is in the hand of her priestess except the will of the nameless name?"

This answer made me hotter than ever. I told them that I would go mad unless I could get to someone with power to stop the execution.

"Oh, there is no haste. For such a thing as the execution of a priestess is not quickly done. The people must be warned, and a great festival be made, and who will keep from singing and happiness on such a day as that?"

I was fairly flabbergasted by this. "Woman, do you mean to say that people would sing and dance while that charming, that lovely—is being murdered?"

The old eyes opened innocently at me. "Ah, my son," says she, "and what could make us sing and laugh except the knowledge that the goddess—"

"Oh, confound the goddess!" said I.

They huddled away from me towards the door, terrified. "Oh, vain-hearted man, what a word dost thou apply to the nameless name?"

I listened to them, somewhere between amusement and disgust. If I had a bit of time, perhaps I could do something. And it seemed that because a splash of molten stone had scalded me to the bone in the exact center of my forehead, I was more or less a distinguished fellow in their eyes.

In the meantime, I got certain facts straight. They were about the strangest facts that I ever heard, but I put them down in order.

1. No member of the priesthood of the land must ever enter the house of the sages. 2. If a sanctified person crossed the boundary, he must be repelled and hurled back at once into the fire, or else the headsman would put him or her to death before all the people. 3. That at such

an execution, the sacrifice assumed all the guilt and all the sins of the entire populace, and that when a priestess was murdered in this way, her blood atoned for every crime. The criminals were even let out of the prison, and those doomed to punishment were forgiven by the state. 4. These executions of priestesses did not happen very often.

As for the vicarious atonement for sin, making one person the scapegoat of many, I had heard something about that business long before. But it was a frightful shock to find that English speaking people in the Twentieth Century, at the Ice Pole or at the equator, either, should believe in this.

However, the fact was there, and Sylvia would have to die because, in doing a good turn to a poor fool of a stranger, she had been cut off from return to safety.

But I could understand, now, why she fainted when she saw that I was bent on carrying her to the forbidden gate.

You might think that she would have preferred a later death by the axe to an instant horror by fire. But as long as life was in her, she would not be able to believe that the fire of the goddess could touch her; and if in fact she was swallowed by the flames, it meant that the goddess had decided to accept her, and had instantly gathered her to the divine breast!

When I made this out from what the old women told me, a good many things were clear. And if I had luck, I would beat this bloodthirsty people out of their chance to get rid so easily of all their sins!

WHILE they were talking, they brushed me off, and when they saw that I was pretty well singed, here and there, they went off and brought me a complete new outfit, about ten jumps ahead of the burned one. And now, all in purple and gold with a tremendous cloak sweeping back over one shoulder, I was taken to interview they did not know whom—they simply had been ordered to bring me to a certain door.

And, when they had landed me there, at the end of several winding corridors and flights of steps, all apparently cut out of the living rock, they knocked, and turned the doorknob, and saw me inside—then scurried off.

No, I was sort of pushed in by myself, and then I found myself in a long, narrow room which was rigged up like a laboratory. At its far end was a big man wearing a long white robe, or apron, that covered him from neck to heel; and his head was covered with a white coif. His back was turned to me, and he was giving all his attention to a balance scales of the most delicate sort. The beam, mind you, was no bigger than a ray of light, so to speak; it looked as though a breath could be measured in that machine, and the man in white was adjusting the balance by touching it with a long needle.

I waited a minute, but no one else appeared, and no one spoke to me, so finally I cleared my throat rather noisily.

The big fellow in white turned slowly about. When he faced me, I saw that his face was masked in a gruesome manner, and that he was looking out of narrowed eye slits. Perhaps that was because of the faint, acrid odor that filled the air.

But when he saw me, the needle—if that's what the tool was—dropped out of his hand and tinkled on the floor. And the man himself slumped into a chair, and grabbed the arms of it hard with his hands.

Even at that distance, I could feel him shake. I said, "I was sent here. But maybe I'm interrupting something important."

The man in white gave me no answer for another long moment. Then he pushed himself up from his chair on trembling arms and standing before me, he tore the hood from his head.

His hair was as white as the cloth had been; I never have seen a finer, purer head of silver hair. But the face under it was young. It was a worn and tortured face, but it was wonderfully familiar to me.

And then he said, "Are you, in mercy's name, Bill Cassidy—or his ghost?"

It was the voice of Cleve Darrell!

## CHAPTER 18

### Reunion at the Ice Pole

**M**Y MIND, stunned and protesting, half denied my eyes and all my other senses, and vowed that this could not be he—not Cleve Darrell—but a

cousin, a brother, an older man, who had lived a long weary time in the center of hell!

But I started for him with my hands out, grinning, and then laughing, and then howling like an hysterical fool with joy and bewilderment and wonder. For I had spent too much life and time in the search for him to really believe, in the end, that I had found him.

And as I crossed the floor to get to him, a million pictures crossed my mind, also, such as the gun of poor Franklin, and the Eskimo dead, face downwards, in the snow; and I saw the iceberg turn turtle again, and felt once more the flaming white rush of the Fountain of Life as it filled the crater of the volcano.

I began wringing his hands, while he looked on me without a smile, but with wonder and awe.

Then, when I could get my voice working, I cried out, "Cleve, what brought you here, and how did you come, and what happened in the laboratory, and what was behind your disappearance, and did you really come up here just to be safely alone with your work?"

Then, at last, he smiled, faintly. "Leave that all to the side. I got up here without a miracle. You may find out how, later on. I'm not sure. But you—did you fly? Have you landed an aeroplane up here?"

I shook my head.

"You don't fly an aeroplane," said I, "to find a place that doesn't exist. No, Cleve. I'll tell you what—I came out of a crazy book that's out of print, and the only copy is destroyed. Everything that happened to me from first to last is a dream that never happened—any more than it's true that I'm talking to you here in the midst of nowhere."

He merely nodded. "Now start at the first," he said.

Well, I started at the first. I told him the whole yarn. By the time I was nearly finished, I had lost most of my interest in what *had* happened. I broke out:

"Now what happens to that girl? Don't tell me that she's really to be sacrificed?"

I'll never forget how he looked at me, when I said this, and how his grave glance seemed to measure me up and down, while he found the right words for the answer—as a man does when he has to speak to a

child about a matter which it's hard to express in words of one syllable.

"Out with it, Cleve. Tell me the truth. You don't have to use logarithms about a subject like this!"

"Tell me what the girl means to you, Smoky."

"It isn't what she means to me that counts," said I. "She's over and above me. She's outside the understanding, even, of an ordinary fellow like me."

Said Darrell, with his faint, old smile, "She's one of those rare creatures, a perfect woman. Is that it?"

It made me mad. I glared at him. "You think that I'm sentimental about her," said I. "But let me tell you this. If she's not perfect to look at, at least she's my idea of beauty. She's all that my eye can hold. And as for the rest, she has all the courage, dignity, gentleness, sweetness and humility that could be packed inside one human skin."

"Men always are apt to do this. Christian men, I mean. It's the inheritance we have from the middle ages—the worship of the Virgin Mary, transferred to an idealization of all women. I'm not criticizing you, Smoky. But it's interesting to see the thing break out in you in such a clear and elementary form of worship. She *does* seem more than mortal to you, doesn't she, by a good long shot?"

"What if she does?" I snapped. "And now I want to hear you, as you sit back and analyze me, and analyze a girl that you've never seen. I want to find out what higher mathematics does when it lays hold on a creature that's only a name. I want to see you materialize Sylvia. Go ahead, Cleve."

"You're angry," said he. "And I don't blame you, in a way, for being angry. I can only tell you this, about the girl, the priestess. It may be for the best that she is to be sacrificed. If she is sacrificed at all, it *will* be because it is for the best."

"YOU mean to tell me," said I, lowering my voice, and speaking through my teeth, "that there's a *best* which can be served by the murder of that girl? Lord, Cleve, if you could have seen her walking toward the horrible white face of the fire, ready to step right off into it—you wouldn't be so calm about the thing,

just now. You wouldn't just stand there."

"Wouldn't I?" said Darrell.

I hardly dared to look up from the floor to his face, because I expected to find the cold, reflective smile on it. And by heaven, I was right—the smile was there.

I stepped back from him, because I wanted to get a better, a more thoroughly comprehensive mental grip on the whole subject of this man's mind and heart.

"Cleve," said I, "you are always outside my sphere in mathematics, and that sort of thing, but you always had a human being's heart. Have you lost it?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "According to your way of looking at things," said he, "perhaps I have."

"The poor girl I've been talking about—say it straight out, that she means nothing to you."

"If I must say it straight out, as you command," said he, "then I must admit that I care very little what happens to her."

I was white hot. I was choked with anger and disgust, and disbelief that this was Cleve Darrell speaking to me. I counted out my points on the tips of my fingers.

"Am I your friend, Cleve?"

He said, with something in his voice that meant a good deal, "No man ever had a better."

"Thanks," said I. "But I just want to be logical. Except for that girl, where would your friend be now?"

"Charred in the bottom of the crater, I suppose," said he, blandly.

"She saved me from that," said I. "Then answer me—how can you help feeling something about her?"

"Well, Smoky, I won't go into the thing and try to be logical. I'll simply have to tell you that my heart has invested itself in other things, that's all!"

"Heaven help you, Cleve," said I. "You've gone ahead so far that you've dehumanized yourself!"

He listened to me quietly, thoughtfully, and his voice was deep, and utterly calm, as he answered. "There are goals of the human race—goals of achievement and of progress so glorious, so divine, Smoky, that when one conceives them, and begins to put hand to the labor, the welfare of individual cases ceases to be of much im-

portance. The other is so much bigger."

I believed what he said. It sickened me, but I believed it. And suddenly my whole journey to the north seemed a fantastic and senseless thing. The Cleve Darrell I had been trying to "rescue" was utterly non-existent. The old Darrell was wiped out and in its place was a mere reasoning machine.

I said at last, "All I've heard about her, so far, is from a pair of old women; I don't believe what they tell me. I can't believe people can be such devils. Will you find out the truth for me—the exact truth?"

He hesitated a moment, even over this request, but at last he nodded. "Yes, I'll find out for you exactly what is to happen to her. And now, Smoky, tell me what your hopes and plans are."

"My plans are to get you and that girl, and take you both back to civilization."

"How?" said he.

"By the way that I came."

"You had one of the greatest bits of freakish luck that I've ever heard of. I doubt if another man, even with all of your courage and adroitness, could manage to get through—not one in a hundred, if a hundred tried every year for a century. The drift of the ice must have been exactly perfect. If we three were to start out on such a trip we'd all die."

He was so calm and logical about it, that I grew furious again. "Then, if my plan doesn't seem good to you, what do you suggest?"

"You must understand, Smoky, that your magnificent journey to the north was undertaken through a misconception. You thought that I would wish to be rescued from some mysterious difficulty. You'll have to understand that, instead of that, I'm engaged in greater and happier work than I've ever undertaken before. I can't leave my place here. I don't wish to." He said it with a lift of his head and a ring in his voice.

**I** TELL you, malice and almost hatred came up in me when I heard him say that. "Tell me this—that piece of metalized wood or whatever it is—that piece with the message scratched on it—"

"Well?" said he.

"Wasn't that a cry for help that you

threw out—and an incomplete cry because you were cut off from a chance of finishing it?"

His face darkened. "That's a matter that I can't discuss."

"All right," said I. "We'll drop it. But let's talk about the other thing. . . . I've spent a couple of years and more in trailing you. And I can't help being interested in you, even if you're no longer interested in the world. Tell me again—you really prefer to stay here, at your work?"

"I do," said he.

"With a hope of returning to your country, or not?"

"That's a matter of no importance," said he.

"Your country is of no importance?"

"No."

"The fact that you're an American—that's of no importance?" He shrugged his shoulders. His head went up higher than before, and I continued, in a hard, steady voice, pressing him. "And the whole business that used to knock you kicking, you loved it so much—the old Rocky Mountains, and the shooting trips, and the evenings by the campfire—"

"Smoky," said he, "I'm sorry to say that it seems to me that you're talking like a child!"

"I remember you sitting by the campfire, one night," said I, "after we'd been trailing an old scoundrel of a grizzly all day—and the grizzly, we finally found, had been play-hunting us—I remember at the end of that hot day, when the cool of the night was turned on, and the stars came out of the faucet and filled up the sky with a shower—I remember you drinking your coffee, and looking up, and saying that all your work could go hang, and all the mathematics in the world could never get a man half as close to God as you were at that moment! But you've changed your mind since then, I guess?"

"Smoky," said he, "a man's life cannot be measured by years. It's only a little over two years since I last saw you. But I'm more than two years older. A good deal more. To you it seems, I'm sure, that hardly enough months and years have passed to enable me to take up an entirely new viewpoint. But to me, the time seems ample. It was centuries ago that I gave

up my old ideas, and melted into a new world of ideas and tastes and desires."

I looked at his white head, and his sunken eyes. No, there was nothing left to him that resembled the man I had known before. Nothing except that glorious, great, smooth brow, that seemed to represent a capacity for all the high thinking in the universe. The rest had been changed. Work, long hours, immense conceptions, might have altered him. But I had a feeling that there was something else. Pain—that was what it looked like to me.

"Well, then, Cleve," said I, "You've thrown the whole business smash out of your life. You're not going back?"

"No," said he. "Well, I can't be entirely sure. The fact is that I don't know. I might pop up there among my old haunts at any time. It's indefinite."

"Say it once more—you like this, up here—without a home, without your country, without your own West, without your friends—"

"You don't understand—" he began.

"Say yes or no."

"Then it's—yes," said he.

I laughed in his face. "You're a liar," I told him.

## CHAPTER 19

### Interlude

**T**HAT touched him, and to the quick, mind you.

He had a temper. I saw his nostrils flare and his eyes flash, now. I was glad of it.

"That's a strong word," said he.

"You've been telling me some strong lies," said I.

He took a breath. "Don't say that again," he remarked.

I shrugged my shoulders. "I've earned a right to get something from you besides upstage hooey," I told him. "You can't talk me off like this. I want to get at what's behind you. And it's up to you to let me know. You're not playing fair and square, and you know it."

"I know nothing of the kind," said he.

"You're not a hound," said I. "I know you too well for that. Your heart bleeds for that girl. And you're aching inside

on account of your country, and the old barren range, and the jingle of spurs, and all that. You're lying to me, Cleve, because up here there's something that holds you in the hollow of its hand. You're afraid. That's what's aged you. Fear! You've been living with it, breathing it, eating it. Why don't you come out with it? Why dodge and hide? I've fought my way through to your side. Tell me what's got at you. If it's not all algebra, maybe I can help. I've this, for a starter!"

And I slid Judge Colt out of my clothes, and let him flash, and put him back again. Then I saw that he was looking at me with a sort of pity. And suddenly I changed the talk altogether, and said:

"Well, then, you want to stay here. But I don't. If I can't help you; and if Sylvia is outside of my reach; then I want to get back to my country as fast as I can. Rubbing elbows with an active volcano may be your idea of a grand time. But I prefer to herd dudes on the old ranch. You tell me how I'm to get back, will you?"

He sighed and shook his head. "Smoky, I can't," he said.

"You can't? Well, tell me just to please my curiosity, how you got up here?"

He shook his head again. "I can't do that, either," said he.

My anger fairly stifled me. "I'm to stay here and rot—you wouldn't lift a hand to help me. Is that it?"

At this, he took in a long breath; he couldn't face me, but looked past me as he said, "I can tell you this much. My—associates—have to be consulted in everything. Certainly I shall put your case before them."

"Don't trouble yourself too much," said I. "Suppose that they're too busy when you want to talk about me?"

"They are men," said Darrell, "of brains so great, of interests so huge, Smoky, that I am no more than a child compared with them. You can be sure of one thing. Whatever they decide will be for your best interests—or rather, for interests greater than you or I, Smoky, can conceive."

"Oh, blast these wise men," said I. "They're the same lot that made the rule about killing the priestess if she enters

that outer door from the crater, I suppose. Are those the same crows?"

"You're simply being flippant, now," said he.

I began to sweat. "Cleve," said I, "I know that you're better than this. A lot better. But I'm pretty sick from listening to you. I've told you everything from the first. I've not hidden a thing. And you've given me, in return, a lot of wind and mystery that means nothing. You're hitched up to events so infernally important that life and death no longer mean a thing to you, it appears.

"Well, I don't hitch onto that sort of thinking. I say, if you're being honest with me, heaven help you! And if you're not being honest with me, you're a low hound. Now, if I'm free to get out of this room, I'm going, and the next time I see you, it'll be because you hunt me up."

I turned around and marched to the door.

AT EVERY step, I expected to hear his voice sing out behind me, or to hear his footstep overtaking me, but I was wrong. There was no move from him, no move whatever! When I got to the door, I turned the handle, and found that it opened readily, and then I looked back at him.

He stood exactly where I had left him, and his head had dropped to the side and down, as though a weight sank it, and if ever weariness and thought combined in the face of a man, I saw it in the young-old face of Cleve Darrell.

My heart melted. I wanted to go back to him and try all over again, but somehow I realized that nothing I could say would be apt to budge him. He was beyond my reach. So I went out into the hall, and there I found the two old women, and they showed me the way back to my room.

I had one encounter on the way back.

We had passed out of the one of the regular, narrow corridors of communication into a larger hall, and crossing this we met up with that same high-headed brunette whom I had seen with the priestess in the garden, or conservatory. I stood and blinked at her. The old women had been right. Anyone had access to this place—if he or she had courage enough and the

white fire was not roaring and burning outside—save only Sylvia, who was a priestess. A messenger had brought my clothes. Alice had followed us here. But Sylvia must die.

When she saw me, she came straight on and stood close, and her fine eyes narrowed to glints of light.

"Oh, hero that thou art—worm that thou art! Thou inconsiderable nothing! Thou wearest the form of a man, and thou hast the soul of a puff of wind. And now thou has betrayed the noblest and the best, the simplest and the sweetest of all women. May terrible hell receive thee!"

And she went on, while I stood in a trance, without being able to speak a word in reply. She had not spoken over a whisper, and when my two escorts came bearing down on me, she was gone again before they could catch her.

That encounter gave me enough to think about, the rest of the way to my room, for it was clear from what Alice had said that there were some members of the community who did not share in the belief that the sacrifice of blood could purify the others and free them from the dangers of sin.

If Alice doubted it, as she most apparently did, the others were sure to agree with her.

I thought I must find out something about those strange people and I got one of the old crones to talk to me about their beginnings, and the land they had come from.

She told me that their race had always lived in the Smoking Land, and that they had, according to legend, sprung up out of the soil to honor the great goddess.

I listened to this fable with interest. These people were like a slice of sixteenth or seventeenth century England put down here in the Arctic; and if their forebears had not come from that England, I was willing, as before, to eat a fur hat.

But the old lady knew nothing of that.

She entertained me, then, with ballads. She chanted them to soft, droning, weary tunes—ballads about the merry greenwood, and good old England, and Robin Hood, and all the rest. It was grand to hear her. She was a charm when she sat forward in her chair and fixed her eyes on the floor, and went through her

tunes. I found myself laughing and nodding with the rhythm.

But all that she knew of the history of the country was vaguer than mist, and yet I could imagine that she had the whole tradition locked up in her mind as it came down to the people.

If I wanted to know more details, she said, I would have to speak to one of the wise men, since it appeared that access to them was granted me freely.

Then she went off, and presently she came back carrying a tray, and I sat down to eat meat that was not beef, but that tasted like it. It was the flesh of the musk-ox, of course. Besides, there was a mess of stewed greens of some sort, and a root that was something like potatoes.

There were just those three articles of food, but all were good, and all were served up in such quantity that there was more than I could eat, besides a meal of leftovers for Murder. They had brought him in with the food, and he lay at my feet and guarded me against the dangerous world. I was mighty glad to have him, let me tell you!

**I** FINISHED off my meal. The dishes were taken away, and I said that I would like to sleep, so she showed me where the light turned off. That, finally, was the proof that this whole little underground city was lighted by electricity!

She showed me too, where the baths were to be found, and pointed out the button I was to press in case I wanted anything.

So she went off, and I peeled, and dived into the bed. The mattress was not all that it could have been, I suppose, but it was better than drifted swan's down to me after two years of camp life. I dropped a thousand fathoms into a profound sleep.

When I woke up, it was still dark in the room, and for a while I lay there, wondering why it was that the sun had not come up. Then, gradually, I remembered that I was underground, and that the only light would be from the electric fixture.

After a warm bath and a good breakfast, I began to tell myself that life up here in the middle of the Ice Pole was not half so bad. A man could enjoy himself so

long as he had comfortable sleeping quarters, a fine room, excellent clothes, all the food that he could eat and all the liquor he could drink.

I thought of Sylvia and a deep melancholy flowed over me.

So I asked one of the cronies about her, and she said that this was the day of her trial and that certainly I would have to be there, because I was one of the important witnesses. Since she was the priestess of the goddess, only one of the wise men could sit in judgment on her.

"Who are these wise men?"

"Thou knowest," said the dame, "for thou has spoken with one of them."

"I saw only one. Are the rest like him?"

"How shall I try to describe them? They are not all alike. Some are old, and some are young. But they are all terrible in wisdom and in strength."

"What can they do?" said I.

She waved her hand, and laughed a little. "Everything," said she.

"Make the sun shine in the dark of the year?" I asked.

"Yes, if they wish to," said she, simply.

"I don't believe that," I answered.

"To see is to believe," said she. "Also, they bring storms, and they send them away. They fatten the flocks in the fields. They cause the plants to grow. They part the rocks, and make them close again."

She pointed downward. "It is they," she said, "who keep the boiling Fountain of Life from springing up, wildly, and bursting the mountain apart, as once the mountain burst, in the ancient days."

"The mountain burst, eh?" said I.

"Yes, and liquid fire ran out over the ground. Thou mayest see where it hardened, twenty feet deep on the surface of the good soil."

I could imagine the eruption. "But now," said I, "there's no more fear of the volcano?"

"There is no fear," said she. "For the wise men know. They control it."

"How," said I, "with witchcraft?"

She turned up the palms of her hands and her eyes. "They make light which is cold, and cause the fresh wind to blow through the heart of the mountain," said she. "How shall I say how these things are done? Who may understand, except their own wise hearts?"

I agreed that they must be very wise indeed, and I asked when we were to go to the trial, and then, pat, like a stage direction, there came a bang at the door, and it was opened by a sleek little youth in tights who said that I was wanted at the trial of the priestess.

## CHAPTER 20

### Judgment of the Wise Men

THE boy was not alone. With him was a squad of soldiers who guarded me to the place of the trial. And on the way, I had a glance at one of the basic industries of the Smoking Land. We came down one of those subterranean roads and, by the opening of a door, I heard a tremendous clangor and clattering. I looked in through the big entrance at such an underground chamber as I had never dreamed of.

It must have been two hundred feet long, and the ceiling was a good fifty feet from the floor. It was supported by huge pillars, roughed out of the living rock from which the space had been hollowed. And once more I was shocked and amazed to think of the amount of labor that had been spent in making that underground city! This big hall was split up by barriers into small compartments, and in every compartment was a forge, and around every forge there were men at work. I think that those expert mechanics were making anything and everything from needles to plate armor, and the din of the hammers was terrific.

A little later we got to the place of the trial. And that was a chamber very nearly as large as the forge room. It was still loftier, though. I've never seen a cathedral nave to compare with it for sheer size, and the whole floor was black with people, thousands of them. I saw that there were children with them; some of the mothers held up the little ones high on their shoulders to avoid the danger of having them crushed in the sway of the crowd.

My guards made a way for me through this human mass. Two of them extended their long halberds so as to make a wedge, inside of which we walked. Whatever the point of the wedge touched was soon sure to move, and move with a spring.

I took this opportunity to size up the faces of these strange people. There were some with faces so round and eyes so slanted that they would have passed easily among the Esquimaux around Point Barrow. And there were others as blond as you please. But the average type was big in body, apt to be bowed in the legs—rather a feature of strength than deformity, I should say. The face was broad, and rather rounded, though the nose might be decidedly aquiline.

Our goal was a dais at the farther end of the room, and on it was a higher platform where three men sat behind a long table, with fellows who looked like clerks nearby them. On the lower part of the dais were several soldiers, and I was placed before them.

I stared hard at the three at the long table. They were elderly men, two of them, and looked to be of the pure Caucasian type—blue-eyes, blond. And they were handsome, in a grim, inhuman way. Men of about fifty-five or sixty, I should have said, with thought in their faces, and infinite refinement expressed in their slender, tapering hands.

But the third man got most of my attention, for it was Cleveland Darrell!

He was be-wigged and be-robed like the other two, and he looked enough like them to have passed as the twin of either.

I saw that he avoided my eyes; and my heart fell. Yes, every pair of eyes in the great crowd was fixed on me, the stranger. Even the two older judges seemed seriously interested in me; for they stared, and then murmured to one another. But my friend, Darrell, whom I had trekked so many thousand miles through a cold hell to find—he found it embarrassing, it seemed, to look at me at all!

Just then the interest of the crowd switched suddenly away from me, and I heard a rumble, deep-voiced, through the crowd. "The priestess!"

There she came, guarded, and two women in splendid robes beside her—Alice and another. But in spite of their greater height, their fine faces, their magnificent clothes, Sylvia in simple black and white, with her still, far-off look, made them look like beggars beside a queen.

She was brought up onto the dais and

placed not far from me. There was a chair for her, and before she sat down in it, she bowed three times to the judges, and then she looked calmly about her and gave a smile and a nod to the soldiers of the guard whom she knew. She did not overlook me, but gave me a special smile.

THE crowd was quieter now, but I could hear the wide whisper of the thousands breathing, and the rustle of clothes, like a far-off wind. The central figure among the judges said:

"Sylvia, daughter of Cuthbert, one time priestess of the goddess and keeper of the nameless name, it is charged that you have passed beyond your bounds and entered the forbidden gates. Witnesses stand here ready to confront you. What say you—guilty or not guilty?"

She stood up and answered. "I am Sylvia, the daughter of Cuthbert, but I am still the priestess, as well. I was endowed with the office, I have kept it truly, and what man or woman or child dares to say that the word of the goddess had gone out against me, to strip me of my place?"

The words were much louder than the voice, but the clear, easy enunciation carried her speech to the distant corners of the hall. She spoke without anger or any other passion. And out of the crowd there arose a wide murmur of affectionate approbation. They loved her. It was plain to see that. The air fairly throbbled with their emotion.

"That is a point not to be argued. Sylvia, daughter of Cuthbert, how do you plead?"

"I shall not plead," said she, "until you have answered my protest. Am I here as the daughter of Cuthbert, only, or as the priestess, only?"

"Thou *must* plead," said the judge. "Otherwise, I must call the witnesses, examine their statements, and then proceed to judgment."

"I shall not plead," said she, calmly, "except as the priestess of the goddess."

The judge frowned, but here the man on his right whispered to him, and finally he nodded.

"Then we allow you that title," said the judge. "Is your voice now guilty or not guilty?"

"Guilty, my lord!" said she.

A faint moan came from the audience. The judge frowned at them and they were still. Yes, with a single glance, he whipped them into silence! That same look would have been enough to sink my own heart into my boots, I think.

"If thou art guilty," said the judge, "thou shalt assuredly die."

"For death I am prepared," said the girl in her dauntless way.

"In what manner, and out of what madness didst thou enter the forbidden gate?" asked the judge.

"In this manner, as thou seest me now, free to make a step forward," said she.

The judge shook his head.

"Ralph, son of Raoul," said he, "didst thou see her freely enter, of her own will?"

And a burly soldier answered, "I saw her carried into the hall in the arms of this man."

The judge looked at me. "Didst thou," said he, "carry this woman through the gate, she lying senseless in thine arms?"

I hesitated. Then it seemed to me that there might be a dash more of hope for Sylvia if I answered yes. "Yes, I carried her in. For fire of the volcano was bursting all around us. It was showering like water!"

"What has thou to say, then, to give reason why we should not sentence thee, and give thee to death?"

"I never heard of such balderdash!" I answered. "This girl, this holy and good woman, had showed me the way to that gate, and your own people had sent word to her that I could only come by going past the Fountain of Life. Well, by her aid I managed to do it, and then, as the fire broke out and the devil was loose, she would have turned back and been surely eaten up in the fire. So I caught her up in my arms. And she struggled against me. And when she saw that I insisted on carrying her toward the nearest gate, she fainted. That's the gospel truth that I'm telling."

The judge merely said, "Force or no force, the priestess has entered the gate. She confesses her guilt. As for the other, the man—give thy judgment, my friend."

And then Cleve Darrell stood up, and looked at me with a thoughtful eye, and said, "Why should you hesitate? Here's

a law broken, and the man who broke it. If the priestess goes to the fire, he must be punished, also."

I listened to this speech and would not believe that I heard it. "What punishment will you name?" asked the central judge.

"The executioner and his ax!" said Darrell.

## CHAPTER 21

### The Story of Darrell

**I**T WAS as though someone had hit me on the point of the chin. There was the same shock from in front, and the same stiffening mallet-blow at the base of the brain.

For it was Cleve Darrell who was sentencing me to death!

The third judge now spoke up, saying, "It is true that the woman must die, but as for the man, he has come from a great distance, and because of a friend. The laws of the Smoking Land are strange to him; and a stranger's way should be made easier."

Somewhere, through the haze of my stunned brain, I heard a woman sobbing—not for me, I knew, but for poor Sylvia. Then Sylvia's own voice came out clearly and sharply, saying:

"He would have saved me. It was his will and his strength to save me that brought me into the danger of death. What law is this and what justice if an innocent man, and one who knoweth not our laws, be condemned to death, like a brute beast by hungry men?"

Said the chief judge, "Thou hearest, brother, that two voices speak on his behalf. What dost thou say?"

"I say," said Darrell, "that my heart aches to speak against him. In another life, which I have almost forgotten, I know that he was a friend to me. I know that he has come here to find me, and dared a great many dangers. But what is my wish, my lord, except to keep the laws of the land strongly? If we loosen the bonds even a little, soon all is lost. Wittingly or unwittingly, death is what he has deserved, and death must therefore come to him!"

Well, I had begun to think that all of those people had become enchanted with

fear of the judges, but when Darrell finished this speech, a howl and groan of detestation and horror roared upward and filled the great room with thunder. Violated friendship was something which the people of the Smoking Land did not like.

And Darrell, as he heard them roar, stood up, and slowly, little by little, swept his eyes over that crowd, and as his glance passed around, a wave of deep silence followed it. I was amazed to see the dignity, the cold, inhuman strength of that man's will power, exerted over so many!

As he sat down again, I heard the chief judge saying, "This is a thing to be known and remembered by many. We know that friendship is dear in all lands. But law is a more sacred mistress. Brother, this sacrifice to truth shall be remembered."

He took up a sort of scepter or baton. "The woman has confessed her trespass. The man has confessed his sin. Therefore I pronounce judgment. He shall die under the axe, and twenty-four hours shall pass before his death. And the priestess shall be bound hand and foot and cast into the fire that burns on the altar of her goddess. She, perhaps, may there save the life of her priestess!"

A long, breathless gasp of horror and fear and grief came from the throats of that crowd.

In the meantime, I struggled back out of my dream, and I shouted out, "Cleve, you're not really letting me down like this! You're not such a—"

Half a dozen of the guards hit me like a flying wedge in football. They did not need the added weight of their armor to flatten me out like a steam roller. I went down, and they all kicked me for goals at the same time, and they all scored the goals, and carried me out through that crowd.

The sparks were flying out of my brain for a long time, and when finally I was seeing fairly well again, I was lying securely in my former room. I was tied up like a chicken for the market—so tightly and in so many places, that I could hardly get a full breath down deep into my lungs.

I was so angry at Cleve Darrell that I forgot the darkness, I almost forgot my approaching death. But not for long. Presently, in such a little rag of time, I

should be dead up here at the cold end of nowhere, and all report of me would simply be some vague and indefinite hint, traveling far south from Point Barrow, about a fantastic fool who called himself Cassidy, and who walked out over the ice of the northern ocean, and never was heard of again!

Yes, that was all that would be left of me, and of my discovery and all that the world would know of Sylvia, the priestess, would be nothing at all!

**I** TELL you, the thought that my world of people would not even see an epitaph to remember me by fairly sickened me, and then it stung me so deep that I writhed back and forth. I was still writhing when the door of my chamber opened and someone stepped inside. The stranger stood still in the blackness. I howled out:

"If the time has come for me to go, turn on the lights, and I'm ready. I only want to leave a little message behind me for Dr. Darrell—plague his soul!"

Then the light flicked, and the ample current of the light filled the room, and there was Cleveland Darrell just inside the door. He was still wearing the robe and the wig which he had sported as a judge.

He took them both off, saying nothing, while I looked up at him, wondering how my heart could be so filled with hatred and contempt mingled with the ache of an old affection.

And then he leaned over me, and touched the ropes that tied me with the edge of a knife; they snapped away, and he gave me a strong hand to help me to my feet.

While I stood there, wavering and sick, I was stunned and delighted, all together.

"It was all a play, Cleve. You never intended to desert me!" I said finally. He nodded. "I'm a hound ever to have doubted you," said I.

"Man, said he, "remember that you're still a long distance from being free. And you probably will die, Smoky."

I waved my hand. Dying, as a matter of fact, did not seem a matter of importance, just then. "I knew that the real man was behind you. Something down inside of me was working and telling me that Cleve Darrell never could have

changed. When I first saw you—you were play-acting in that room among the test tubes, and all of that. Am I wrong?"

He shook his head. Not a ghost of a smile had touched his mouth or his eyes. But he was resting his hand upon my sleeve, and his mournful, deep eyes stared at me as though I were a ghost—a thing raised by his own thought.

"What was it, Cleve?" said I. "Sit down here. Tell me everything—or should I start now to try to break away?"

"The time hasn't come for that," he said. "I should have waited till the last moment. But it seemed to me that it would be worth the extra risk, if I could talk to you for this time. There's a long hour before we make the try."

"To get away?"

"Yes," he said.

"And the girl?" I asked.

He smiled at me, for the first time.

"I haven't forgotten her," said he. "It will be three of us, or none. "That's all."

I nodded at him, with my heart swelling. To think that I had doubted him was enough to choke me, of course. "God bless you, Cleve," said I.

He shrugged his shoulders.

"We have about one chance in two or three hundred."

That damped my spirits a shade, I must admit. But now that he was with me, I felt that we could cut our way through anything.

"No matter what happens, it'll be worth while to tackle the job together, Cleve. We can't do any more than die trying."

He nodded. "But if we miss," said he, "we won't have an easy death, Smoky. The greatest brains in the world are here in this mountain, and if they catch us, they'll give us a death that will be so complete and so perfect, old fellow, that Apaches would turn green with envy to watch it."

"Go on, Cleve," said I. "Tell me everything. What was wrong in that room, the first time I saw you?"

"In that room," said he, "everything that I did and said was heard—and seen! Every whisper, every change of expression. In this room, you've been watched in the same way. Until a few minutes ago—when I think I put the

mechanism out of order for an hour or so."

"Heard and seen?" said I "Yes, heard, perhaps, by some funny electrical device. But don't tell me that they can see in the dark!"

He smiled again. "The equivalent of seeing," said he. "They could count your heart-beat and your respiration."

"How the devil could they?" said I.

"It would take me the entire hour to explain that device alone," said he. "Shall I use the time that way?"

I shrugged my shoulders. "Go back to the beginning and tell me what happened to you—at the laboratory, first of all," said I.

HE SIGHED and closed his eyes. And then he settled down in his chair, opposite me, and said, "I'll go back to that. Back to that night when I thought that I was about to make a discovery that would stop the pulse of the world." He laughed a little.

"Were you wrong?"

"I was a young fool," said he. "I thought, for one thing, that the whole miracle of life was about to lie in the palm of my hand."

"Were you wrong?"

"Yes," he said, solemnly, "and I've an idea that ten thousand years from now, science will still be just as far as ever from the true solution!"

"I saw you chucking thunder and lightning around," said I.

"That's what I'd managed to devise," said he. "Such a war machine as, I suppose, the world never had seen before. Even these cunning devils up here never had even conceived of the like. And that was all that they needed before they started out to conquer the world!"

I swallowed hard. "At the trial today," I suggested, "you were simply trying to pull the wool over their eyes—make them think that you were seeing everything as they wanted you to see it?"

"That's what I was trying to do," said he, "and that's what I managed, I think. Now to go back to the laboratory. . . . I was working with a tube of radioactive gas and a certain solid compound which in turn was capable of acting upon the gas to—"

"Quit it, Cleve," said I. "Get down to

the blood and bones of the thing, will you?"

"That compound and the gas—they are the blood and bones of the thing, I'm afraid," said he. "But I'll simply say that when the gas and the solid combined, they produced an explosion of power—because the power bound up in the atom was suddenly dispersed. The thunderbolt, as you call it, was one form in which that energy could be directed. But there were other ways, too."

"I wondered," said I, "how long a great city would last if it were bombarded the way you blasted the side of that cliff of solid rock!"

"The greatest city in the world," said he, "even Manhattan, all steel and concrete, would be blasted off the face of the earth in five minutes!"

I opened my eyes. I was dead silent, because I could see that he was not lying. He meant what he said!

He went on, with a sort of savage pleasure that I could understand, "I could have flown an airplane over the sea and blown the Alps as flat as the sea, and blown up another set of Alps in the central plain of France. I could have split the Rocky Mountains in two—"

He paused. "I'll let the boasting go, from now on," said he. "But I haven't been exaggerating."

Then he went on, "But I'll go back to the time when I was working there at my tubes. I come to the moment when I felt something in the air that was neither sound nor heat nor light—it was simply a tremor in my own nerves! I turned around, and there I saw—" He paused and put a hand across his eyes. "I saw sections of the steel wall being cut away in great sweeps. They fell outward without a sound, and the agency that cut through them did so without noise. Nothing could be seen.

"I started for the door to get help—to get you—but at the same moment. I was turned into stone."

"Look here, old man," said I, "I'll believe anything and everything, only don't tell me—"

He smiled—a mere twitch of the lips without mirth.

"Simply a little wireless device for passing through me a tension of electricity

so great that I was paralyzed," said he. "And while I was still paralyzed, men came through that gap in the wall and caught hold of me, blindfolded me, and carried me away."

"Great Scott, man, couldn't you even sing out?"

"I COULD do nothing," said he. "And, after all, I was not so very much surprised. There were foreign nations which knew a good deal about my war machine. I call it a war machine, although as a matter of fact, it would have let loose in behalf of commerce and traffic powers so great that all our vast systems of modern machinery are child's play compared with it!"

I thought, then, of what I had seen—and I said: "The machinery that pushes a ship across the Atlantic in five days—is that child's play, too?"

He considered me with a thoughtful eye. "The same work, according to my device, could be done by a machine that one man could pick up and carry. . . . I was put down in what felt like a boat in a stream—for it gave and wavered a little as other weights got into it, and finally I felt that we had started.

Someone took the blindfold from me—someone else set my hands free, and I found myself sitting up in an unlighted little compartment, and, looking down, I saw the laboratory just beneath. At the same time a voice said:

"Thou mayest send the wave!" And I saw the whole end of the laboratory vanish, as though a big finger had flicked away a part of a little sand house. And that wasn't all. Afterward I felt the bump of the explosion hit us in the air. It was like being lifted by a big wave at sea, and, flowing forward off the top of that wave, we shot away at a speed that fairly blurred the stars together. The mountains leaped by. Up the wave, trees or telegraph poles whirled before the windows with the speed of an express train.

"But what interested me so much that I almost forgot any personal danger was the fact that this speed—which I rated at between three and four hundred miles an hour—was worked up without the slightest suggestion of any screaming propeller or

any sort of an engine. It was most uncanny.

"I said to a man who sat next to me in the dimness, 'What form of insulation do your engineers use to kill the sound?'"

"Insulation?" said he. "It is a word unknown to me. But thou wilt find, my friend, that many things are known unto us both by names that differ."

"How many motors are running to drive us at this speed?" I asked. He nearly knocked me out of my seat by telling me that it was not motors that drove us, but expanding rhythmic explosions."

"What in the world did he mean by that?" I asked.

"I couldn't understand, naturally," said Darrell. "It wasn't until long afterward that I found out. But then I saw the hull of our airship, and it looked like the body of a great fish, about fifty or sixty feet long, with one end larger and blunter than the other. The whole thing was streamlined like the body of a mackerel, which is about the fastest *looking* fish that swims the seas. And the wings were simply fins."

"Come along, Cleve," said I.

"I mean it," said he. "Of course, at three or four hundred miles an hour a very small projection would give all the lifting power you want. The propelling force was a sort of tube running through the airship, small as a rifle barrel at the front, and expanding towards the rear until it took up the whole diameter of the vessel. And inside of the first chamber charges exploded—"

"Gunpowder?" said I.

No, something a great deal more powerful than gunpowder, Smoky," said he. He frowned and shook his head. "It's hard to explain what," said he. "But if you want—"

"Great Scott, no," said I. "But what do you mean by progressive rhythms?"

"Simply a delayed explosive—one that burns, you may call it, slowly."

"Something that didn't explode with a bang, then?" said I.

"No, said Darrell. "If you fire a rifle, it kicks back against your shoulder. Well, then, if that explosion came more slowly and steadily, you would only feel pressure against your shoulder, and you could stand up to a great deal more pressure of that type than of the sharply recoiling

sort. It's not a completely new twist."

"Yes, of course," said I. "A push is a lot easier to take than a punch."

"And suppose," said he, "that you conceive a material that explodes from slow to fast, it would start a bullet slowly down the barrel of a rifle, and give it a harder and harder push all the way, eh? And that was the sort of stuff those people were burning up. With it, they jumped that night-fish of theirs through the stars, at a rate of over three hundred miles an hour—at *low speed!*"

## CHAPTER 22

### Genealogy of the Wise Men

I QUIETLY tried to take that in. That would mean around the world in eighty hours!

"Where in blazes would people get the idea, said I, "of putting themselves inside a rifle, so to speak, holding onto it and letting it kick its way through the world?"

"That's the octopus," said he, "that squirts its way through the sea in much the same fashion. Its swimming apparatus is simply a big pump, and the jet of water it throws kicks it backward through the ocean. But the people of the Smoking Land don't have to trouble nature for patterns. They get them out of their own brains!" And he laughed, bitterly, his eye upon thoughts unseen by me.

"Finally," Darrell went on, "I asked where we were bound, and I got a sneering laugh for an answer, and the information that we were bound for the Smoking Land, north of Alaska, and in the region of the Ice Pole."

That remark cleared up the rest of the sentence which I had been unable to guess from the words found on that scratched bit of metallized wood.

"And then," said Darrell, "when I got a chance, I picked up a little broken fragment of material such as I had never seen before. I asked what it was, and my nearest companion told me that a sheet of it, one thirty-second of an inch thick, would run back a steel-jacketed high-speed rifle bullet fired pointblank—

"It was as light as wood and I thought that if it was as durable as all that, it

might serve my purpose. I had on a diamond ring with a sharply pointed facet, and in the darkness I started scratching my new address as well as I could—but the fellow beside me suspected that something was wrong. He grabbed my arm.

"They have wonderful brains in the Smoking Land, Smoky, but they haven't devised a good way of blocking a short right uppercut. I nailed my friend on the point of the chin and then smashed the heavy glass of the window beside me, and threw the scrap of wood through the hole.

"Then other hands caught me as the ship rocked perilously. Finally I was tied hand and foot and remained captive for the rest of the trip. Daylight came on, polar day, dim, and misty. And then down through that mist we dove, like a fish hunting in the deep sea, and made a landing as soft as you please.

"I was taken out of the airship, and got my first glimpse of the smoking mountain that gives its name to the island. We went underground immediately, and a few minutes later I was closeted with an old, decrepit, white-headed man. His hair was thin with age, and finer than cobwebs. It floated around his head and shoulders, and made him look like a very ancient picture of Zeus. And I heard from his lips the reason why I'd been brought to the Smoking Land, and what I was to do for them.

"But before I tell you about that, I had better explain the whole picture of life up here."

"Yes," said I. "Tell me who these people are, and what their blood is, and whether they're English or Esquimau or what!"

"Go back," said he, "a few centuries, to the time when people were breaking their hearts to get across the barrier of the American continents to India. It never occurred to those hearty old sailors of Italy and France and Spain and Portugal and England that the 'barrier' was worth a devil of a lot more than all of India, multiplied by ten. Their minds were still filled with dreams about trees covered with golden fruit and diamond blossoms. . . . The Americas were simply in the way, and when they found that to get around the Horn was no joke, and

that the Strait of Magellan was a regular death trap, they swung to the north and started hammering away at the north-west passage.

"Imagine a very blunt-bowed ship putting out of the port of Bristol with a crew of seventy-nine gentlemen adventures, common sailors, officers, and what-not, plus one lone woman.

"Keep your mind on the woman, in particular, because she's important. Her name is Sylvia."

I stood straight up from my chair and looked at him.

"All right," said Darrell, grinning at me in a strange way. "Your guess is right. She's the ancestress, fifteen or twenty generation, back of your own Sylvia. But now imagine that ship between Greenland and the coast, using up every advantage of what must have been wonderfully favoring winds, and an exceptional clearness of sea. They actually swung around the northern coast of the continent, and got on toward the Behring Sea; and then they were caught in the inevitable ice jam.

But to make their luck stranger and more perfect, the captain, his wife, and some twenty or thirty other survivors, were carried by the ice-currents until they were in view of the Smoking Land. They made the shore, and the Esquimaux they found here were friendly to them.

"The captain and his wife were the king and queen, as you might say, of that little group. The ship was broken up, and here was no chance of using it again. The men intermarried with the Esquimaux, and their descendants, to this day, are the inhabitants of the land. That's why the complexion, is prevailingly white.

"But the captain and his wife, mind you, kept apart from the rest, as a sea-captain was bound to do. And eventually they had children—a son and three fine daughters, and as the daughters got to the marriageable age, they were married to the lads who had been mere ship's boys on the voyage out, not gentlemen adventures; and they were taken into the family of their wily old father-in-law of a captain. For he intended to raise up a dynasty of pure white blood to rule the land.

And that is exactly what happened. For you find, in the mountain here, what

they call the Wise Men, the direct descendants of the captain and the first Sylvia, and you find the rest of the land filled with a people of mixed blood, a sort of white Esquimaux.

"To keep the Esquimaux thoroughly in order, that captain—his name was Philip Grey—devised a religion for them, out of their own beliefs plus a few inventions of his own, one of which was a 'goddess' for the people to worship. The goddess was not only invented, but she was reinforced with a few gunpowder miracles and such, until the Esquimaux were thoroughly awed. Then they were given a steady succession of priestesses, and the priestesses were of the pure blood of the rulers of the land.

Don't you see the idea? Pick out a girl child, and educate her like her white fellows, but simply see that she is taught to believe in the goddess. She remains close to her parents, in the hands of the whites, a tool and a mouthpiece out of which the Esquimaux are easily and perfectly ruled. Is that clear?"

"Philip Grey must have been a genius," said I.

"HE WAS one of the world's great men, in his own way," said Darrell. "There's no doubt of that. And he founded a race up here of which the world is pretty sure to hear one day.

"But to go on. The country filled, eventually, with a mixed breed, who knew nothing about their half-white ancestry, who followed the faith of the goddess, who performed the orders which her priestess passed down from the Wise Men, and who acted as the servants and the guards of the all-whites.

"The whites remained a handful of men and women; and today they are further segregated. Up to the age of—I think it's twenty-five—every young man is educated like his fellows. He may have a command in the guards, or he may turn into a great hunter, but if at the age of twenty-five he shows that he has trustworthy powers, and a brain and a will, he is brought before the Wise Men, and initiated into their orders.

"The Wise Men saw, early in the game, that brains were their tools. So brains were what they used. They could not

have spring and summer in this bleak land, so they made the warmth under the land. They were backed up against a wall, so they had to use their wits every-way they could.

"The result was that very soon they were handing down vastly increased scientific brain-power and knowledge to their descendants. They turned to mathematics as a pastime, almost, and mathematics is the key that unlocks the doors of most of the mysteries of the universe.

"Even so, they would not have made all of their present progress except that now and then they made contacts with the outside world and found out what had been discovered there. Two or three shipwrecks in the course of the centuries—particularly the wreck of a ship belonging to a scientific expedition in eighteen ninety-something—kept them fairly up with the times. And on that broad foundation, they went ahead. Incidentally, though, they clung to some of their old ways. Their clothes, for instance, patterned after the old styles—their speech—it must have been a kind of nostalgia for their felt, and not remembered, origins.

"They learned, very early, to control the great heating plant here—the volcano—by constructing certain great sluices that connect with the sea. The mountain can't explode unless the sluices are blocked up. And with the heat of this great furnace at their command, they soon had comfortable homes, and above all, an almost inexhaustible source of power. They used that power to drill out the heart of the mountain. And they've equipped themselves to lead happy lives—after their fashion.

"But they never have forgotten the old traditions of greener, happier lands to the south. An early type of airship they devised some fifteen years ago. And in their first voyage, they went all over the world. They saw that there were delightful regions. They saw, also, that they were light years ahead of the rest of the world in most of their mechanical devices. And they were simply looking around for some tremendously powerful device that would make them world conquerors.

"Finally they got wind of my experiments, and straightway decided that I

should become their servant. Should teach them my secret."

"And have you?"

"No," said Darrell, looking me straight in the eyes. "Somehow they've never been able to get together exactly the right materials for me!"

He smiled; and I understood.

## CHAPTER 23

### Arms and Two Men

WELL, I began to feel smaller and smaller as the true fineness of Darrell's character showed. It was plain enough that he could have put into the hands of these northern wolves weapons with which—combined with their own inventions—they could have plundered the rest of the world. But he had not done so. He preferred to accept anything rather than to turn these half-barbarians, half-supermen loose upon the rest of the world.

"Cleve, you used to beat me in the old days with that uppercut of yours. You beat me a lot worse now, in other ways. You mean that you've only been pretending to work for them in their laboratories?"

"That's all," said he. "And furthermore, I'll never work for any man again. I'm through tinkering with life's deep secrets. If I could get back to my country, I'd get a job riding a cow pony, or pitching hay, or digging ditches. I've had my hands on power too long. They ache from it—and tremble. I've seen too much, Smoky. . . ."

He paused, and seemed lost in thought, while I pondered him again, and wondered over him. Pain had scarred his face as I had never seen it before, or since, in any man upon this earth. And now, out of the torment, he had reached his decision. Darrell was made of different stuff from most. He stood by himself; he was on a mountain peak of strength, far above the general level of the rest of us.

I felt that, as I watched him.

And now he began undoing a bolt of cloth which he had brought along under his arm. Inside were two pairs of cuirasses similar to those I had taken from Murder's original owner.

He told me to put one on, and I was only too glad to. I got my doublet off, put the cuirass next to my shirt, and dressed again, while he was doing the same.

He did not need to tell me that there was the worst sort of danger and trouble ahead. When a man puts on armor, there is only one reason for it. He expects steel or bullets or both to be coming his way before long.

"What is this stuff, Cleve? Is it fossilized something or other?"

"It was made a century or so ago by one of the wisest of the Wise Men," said Darrell. "Apparently he used a vegetable fiber, which he pressed almost to the consistency of wood. And then he worked on that vegetable substance in a way that no one understands today. By impregnating the fibers, he finally turned out what you see. It's light as wood, and as strong as steel—a good deal stronger than any steel I know about. A five-thousand ton ship, armored with this stuff properly, could laugh at all the big guns, and submarine mines, and airplane bombs in the world. But so far, these people never have been able to duplicate the work of the old fellow who made these. He died before he could communicate his secret process to anyone. They've tried for generations, day and night, to rediscover the process."

"But what about you? Have they been watching you?"

"Every minute."

"Not when I was there with you."

"They wanted to tempt me into talking; but even though there was no one in the room, I was being watched from every side."

"Do they suspect that you're holding out on them?"

"I don't know," said Darrell. "I don't think so. If they really did, they'd torture me until I died to tear the process out of me. I've grown white, I've turned into an old man, Smoky, in fear of that time of torture. I've prayed until my heart ached for the courage to stand the strain, when it comes. Because it surely *will* come, and then if I give way, I've—destroyed the whole of civilization."

I reminded him that I had seen one of the cuirasses before, and he told me about the fugitive I had met to the south.

"He was one of the guards. About two years ago he displeased one of the Wise Men, and he was slated to be flogged until the skin was flayed from his body."

I shuddered. "Is that one of their standard punishments?"

"They are devils, pure and simple. They've lived as autocrats and tyrants for too many centuries for the other people of the Smoking Land to rise against them."

"Have the people ever tried that?" I asked.

"**YES.** Only four or five years ago, I believe, there was a revolt. Half the men of the land were up in arms. But it was no good. They got as far as the inner rooms of the Wise Men, where they were killed like bugs by a neat little electrical device that I was shown once. I heard that when the poor devils tumbled over, there were actual wisps of smoke curling from their blackened flesh.

"The Wise Men are the most arrogant and complacent blackguards I ever saw or heard of, and the only real spice of life to them is to plan what devils they'll turn loose on the sleeping world to the south—and to torture the lower classes up here in the Smoking Land. They use the goddess as a name to hide behind. They make the priestess their tool"

"She wouldn't stand for it," I declared. "Not Sylvia!"

"I don't mean that the priestess is corrupt," said he. "I simply mean that she's worked on through suggestion. Her mind is made to work along the train of thought *they* want. You see?"

I nodded.

"Well," he went on, "the half white you met was a bold fellow, and when he heard of the sentence which had been imposed on him, he stole one of these cuirasses, and then ran. I don't know how he got through. But he was all iron and able to stand anything, I suppose. There was a terrible commotion here about it. They sent out the sky ships to hunt for him. And the fellow who was interested in having him punished fell into such a fury of sulky rage because the poor devil had got away, that he had to go to bed, very sick."

"Why, Cleve," said I, "they must be ghouls!" I remembered how that run-

away white Esquimaux had been so filled with fear of what might come on him from the north that he had chosen to go out and freeze to death in the blizzard because he dared not interrupt his flight. He must have felt that the very devils were riding the air!

"What's the next step?" I asked Darrell.

"The next step," said he, "is to make sure that we're properly armed."

"I have a rifle and a revolver," said I. "And here's Murder, who'll fight a man and tear his throat as well as the next one!"

He looked at the dog with an appraising eye. "Murder may be a help," said he. "But your own rifle and the revolver will be more."

"Haven't they any weapons like these?" said I.

"No."

"With all their brains, couldn't they copy a revolver or a rifle?"

"They could, of course, but they don't want to have such things lying about. They prefer to defend themselves by electric devices such as I was telling you about, or with bombs. They have explosives that will do a good job of tearing down mountains. Oh, they're a bad lot, but they've never dared to have modern weapons lying about. They turn out a few arquebuses and such old stuff for their guards, and the people on the outside generally hunt with bows and arrows—you've seen the big bone bows, made like the old English longbows. As it happens, that rifle and revolver will probably give us a fighting chance. It would have been quite hopeless without them."

"Is it going to be a matter of fighting our way through?" I asked him.

"Only for a short brush," said he. "If it's a long fight, of course we're done for. It's almost inconceivable to me that we can get out of the mountain without some sort of a fight. Everything is guarded to the hilt!"

"Well," said I, "I'd rather die fighting than under torture!"

"And that's the only alternative," said he.

We looked at one another then, and I know that I was pleased to be tackling the great adventure with Darrell beside

me. He would not fail when the pinch came. He smiled and nodded a bit as though he approved of me, too. But in his smile there was a little frank amusement—I suppose I was making a horribly resolute face.

"And what first?" said I.

"My room," he answered, "then Sylvia . . . and then wings!"

## CHAPTER 24

### *Like a Cat in the Dark*

WE WENT to his room by a way that surprised me. Only once we took one of the great corridors which ran like roadbeds through the mountain. This we crossed, and the rest of the time we were walking in narrow little bylanes that climbed up and descended and twisted this way and that. As we were going down this strange secret passage my friend switched out the powerful little light which he carried in his hand, and the next minute I saw a starry radiance just in front of us, which blotted out in the next instant.

I stood close to Darrell and heard his whisper, "That's bad!"

"I can send Murder down that alley and finish whoever it is," I said.

"Oh, no!" said Darrell.

We stood still. Murder rubbed his massive shoulder against my knees, as though to tell me that he was at hand, and ready. And then something rustled close to us. At the same instant, Darrell switched on his light again and showed me one of the ugliest sights I've ever known—the form of a man leaping through the air with a knife in his left hand, driving it straight at Darrell's breast. And his dark face was contorted with devilish fear and rage and cruelty.

How could he have leaped so soon? He could not have jumped in the dark, and there had hardly been enough time from the snapping on of Darrell's light to the instant when I saw him making his spring.

Not even Murder had time to make a counter leap when the hand of the assassin struck right into the breast of Darrell. The long knife blade went to pieces like glass, and the fragments shivered down in a rain on the floor as the point of

the weapon bit vainly against the impenetrable armor that covered Darrell's breast.

My fist landed flush on the side of the fellow's jaw and knocked him against the wall. Then he fell loosely back into Darrell's arms while Murder stood by, red-eyed, licking his lips, and looking at me for permission to go to work.

I cursed him out of the way and looked more closely at the stranger. He was still so stunned that his eyelids were lowered. And his skin looked as white and delicate as the skin of a woman. A short moustache was beginning to darken his upper lip, and a tuft of beard was forming on his chin. He looked to be about twenty-five years old, and he was a handsome, clean-featured lad.

He opened his eyes, and they were the blue of steel. A cold gray sheen was mixed with their blueness and gave him a certain inhuman savagery of expression.

My Colt was held like a club in my hand.

"He can't be anything except in our way," said I to Darrell.

But Cleve shook his head.

His lips were pinched tight and small with disgust and there was horror in his eyes. "Let him be," he commanded.

I stepped back a little while Murder sat down and cocked his head to keep one eye on the stranger, and another on me, waiting for orders.

I saw Darrell take from the man a long, ponderous old pistol with a great and complicated lock, and a second and shorter knife, which the man wore in the breast of his doublet.

Darrell asked me to tie the fellow's hands, and I did so with a piece of strong twine that Darrell had in his pocket.

In a little while, our captive was quite himself again, there was a decided swelling coming up on the side of his face, though, where my knuckles had smashed against his jawbone.

He stood up as straight and calm as you please, and looked first me in the eye, and then Darrell.

"Why did you try it?" Darrell asked.

"I was ordered to."

"Who ordered you?"

"I'll talk no more," said the boy. "If you murder me, they'll tear you to pieces—slowly, till you die."

"They may do that anyway," said I to Darrell. "They're against you, and they've sent this one as their bloodhound to get the taste of your heart!"

Darrell kept considering his prisoner with a mixture of loathing and pity and interest.

"Murder, eh?" said he. "They wanted you to cut my throat, Arthur?"

"Whatever they wanted," said Arthur, "I've done with talking."

**R**AGE took possession of me when I saw his calmness. I got him by the throat and jammed him back against the wall. I laid the muzzle of my revolver against his temple and snarled, close to his face:

"You talk or you're dead. I don't care, much, either way. I'd rather have you dead quick, than alive and talking!"

Well, I had guessed right. Or my instinct, rather, had done the guessing for me. The red sap ran right out of his face, and his eyes turned wide and glassy.

"He'll kill me!" he gasped to Darrell.

"Yes, he's a pretty wild man, Arthur. I can't do anything with him. If I were you, I'd do what he wants."

"What do you want?" says Arthur to me.

"Your answers to whatever's asked of you," said I.

"Then I am dead a little later," he groaned, "and by such a death as men cannot imagine. But what are the questions?"

"Who sent you after me?" asked Darrell, again.

The young fellow answered, "Wilbur, son of John."

"He himself?"

"Yes, he himself. He talked to me about you. He took me into his confidence." He seemed to gather up some of his lost pride, again, as he said this.

Darrell was nodding. "He sent you to murder me?"

"If thou shouldst leave thy chamber."

"If I so much as left my room."

"That was the order."

"And no warning to be given to me?"

"None."

Darrell sighed. "You see what a nest of snakes this is?" he said to me. I gritted my teeth. "What was your reward to

be, Arthur? It must have been a nice one."

"All thy possessions, and more."

"Not a very large price," said Darrell. "But you've never liked me very well. Tell me this, Arthur—what was it that made Wilbur the son of John so hot to have me dead. He was interested in my experiments up to a few days ago."

"He says that thou wilt never complete the experiment," said Arthur. "He says that thou art such a fool that thou wouldst rather die than make them and thyself the conquerors of the world."

"So he wanted me dead, as soon as he made that decision about me?"

"Yes, then he wanted thee dead."

"And tonight?"

"He had bad dreams. He was troubled in his mind. He thought of thee, and said to himself, 'Yonder is the man!'" Some bit of feeling came into the voice of the boy as he quoted the words.

"It's a rotten bad business," said I to Darrell. "Gag this brat and put him away."

"I can learn something more from him," said Darrell. "He's the son of the great Wilbur, and Wilbur is the king of them all, when it comes to brains and influence. Arthur," he went on, "what is his reason for wishing to have Sylvia murdered?"

"His reason," said Arthur, "is just what thine or mine would be."

"I don't quite know what that reason is," said Darrell.

"Why," said Arthur, surprised, "because he wants to see how far her courage will last when the flames begin to lick up around her. He will have the altar fire low, and fanned so that the blaze will first burn her legs away, and my father swears that before her shins are well roasted, or even cooked brown, she will be shrieking!"

I groaned with disgust, but to my bewilderment I heard laughter, and it was from Arthur.

"For all her piety and her trust in the goddess," he laughed, "we'll hear her screaming, and begging for sweet, swift death!"

I held myself hard, to keep from smashing my fist against his cruel mouth. Darrell, however, watched him in a reflective silence.

"THAT'S all, Arthur," said he. "If I turn you loose, now, and let you go, I wonder if I could trust your word of honor to not repeat anything that you have heard or seen, concerning me, tonight?"

Fierce fire came into the eyes of Arthur. He glanced quickly down to the ground.

"Thou couldst trust me to be silent as a stone," said he. "All my life, besides, I would be a friend to thee!" I thought that Darrell was about to be taken in by these assurances, but suddenly he shook his head.

"You hate me, Arthur," said he, "so bitterly that you can't lie very well to me." He waved him ahead. "We'll go on together, Arthur," said he. "I've already found out that you can jump like a cat in the dark, and therefore we'll be watching you closely. Go on softly and steadily, and perhaps you may live through the night, after all!"

We were in Darrell's room a moment later, and I found it very like my own, except that there were two or three big curtained recesses in it. In one of these we put Arthur, the son of Wilbur, after we'd lashed his feet strongly together, and gagged him thoroughly.

I whispered to Darrell, "Are we safe in here? Can the spies reach us?"

He said deliberately, "I think not."

I jumped. "You don't know?" said I.

"I don't entirely know. But I think that I've found the way of spoiling their devices. Their electrical eyes and ears fail to work sometimes when the wires short-circuit the current—fuses burn out—that sort of thing."

He smiled a little at me. But I was not in a humor to be amused easily.

"Whatever we do we ought to do quickly, it seems to me, Cleve," said I.

"I want to," said he. "The mere thought of getting away from this place makes me dizzy with happiness. I've been trying for years to learn all the ropes, to study the navigation of the airships, and to find, if possible, some companion who would be willing to take the chance and run with me. But now that everything is ready there's one great stoppage."

"What's that?" I asked.

"There's the priestess. You haven't forgotten her, Smoky?"

Forget her? I shuddered when I remembered what the boy had said—how the fire could be controlled so that the flames would devour her body slowly, bit by bit!

"How are we to get her out of her prison?" Darrell said.

"If she's guarded," said I, "we might be able to rush the guards—"

"There'd be a fight, then, and fights make noise, and nose travels far along rock corridors. Besides, they have their system of mechanical ears that pick up sounds and carry them, and identify the places from which they come. We'd have a hundred men around us in no time."

I tried to think; my head simply spun. Darrell, in the meantime, was walking up and down, his head bowed. Finally he said:

"I might try sham authority."

"How?" said I.

"I know where she's kept," he answered. "And after all, I'm one of the inner circle of the powers, in the eyes of the common soldiers. They don't know that I'm just a toy in the hands of their real leaders. They think that I'm one of the chosen few! If I appeared and told them—well, told them, for instance, that the girl was wanted for an examining consultation in my own chamber, by a few of the highest ones—yes, if I used the name of the father of Arthur yonder—there's a very good chance that I could get her back here. From this room—well, later on, as soon as the way was clear, we could start again. I can't think of a better way."

I nodded. "It sounds clumsy, Cleve," said I.

"I KNOW it does," he agreed. "But clumsy inventions are better than none. Otherwise, I don't know how we'll be able to turn the key of her door, or walk her through the guards. If they bring her here, they'll be glad if I dismiss them for an hour."

"Perhaps it might pan out," I admitted. "You'll have to keep a straight face. But look here, Cleve—you're taking all the danger and all the responsibility."

"Your share will come later on," said he. "And while I'm gone, you'll be on the edge of a higher cliff than the one I'm

walking. So just keep a steady grip."

"Go on, then," said I, "and Heaven knows I'll be praying for you while you're gone."

He went at once to the door and there he paused and held out his hand. I gripped it hard, and was glad to find that it was both warm and steady. Darrell's nerve was as splended a thing as could be found in the world.

Then the door closed behind him, and I was alone. Well, that was the beginning of a bad time, you may be sure.

I saw everything that could possibly happen occurring behind my back; I walked the length of long, echoing corridors with my friend. I saw him confront the guards; I heard them laugh in his face!

I paced up and down in a frenzy until, finally, even the thought of the boy in the recess was a comfort. He was possible human companionship.

So I went to the recess and drew the curtain, and looked down into his face.

He was lying flat on his back, and when he saw me, a gleam of mockery, or triumph lighted up his eyes. Finally, I ventured to take the gag from between his teeth.

He dragged in a few deep breaths, and then smiled at me with contempt and mastery. "Count thy few moments," he said to me, "for they are soon ended."

"You lie, Arthur," said I, "and as you've already been told, you're not lying well, today."

At this, he closed his eyes with the heartiness of his laughter; it shook his entire body. I had an almost irresistible temptation to reach down and throttle him, but I controlled it. After all, even this sort of conversation was better than pacing up and down the room in silence, imagining the end of the world.

"Dost thou know why I laugh?" he said.

"Perhaps you're a fool," I suggested.

"In what name will he require the priestess from the guard?" he asked.

"In the name of your sainted father, my friend," said I.

He laughed again. When he could speak, he said, "My father is even now with her, questioning, trying to break down her faith." He began to laugh

again, but for my part, I felt a cold wave of despair come over me.

For there was no question but that he was telling the truth. His malice was too perfect, and the light in his eyes still gloated and gleamed up at me.

And the thing was clear to my eyes—that after we had accomplished so much, Darrell was to be thrown away by the sheerest freak of chance. All hope went instantly out of me.

## CHAPTER 25

### Evasion

**N**OW, for the first time, I have to follow Darrell by himself, as he walked down the narrow twisting ways that brought him, in a few moments, to the door behind which Sylvia was kept prisoner.

Outside, three or four soldiers were keeping guard, sitting on a pair of benches. And the same number, wrapped in cloaks, were lying asleep on the floor. The sergeant in charge of the party got up to challenge Darrell, and Cleve walked straight up to him.

He was recognized. The sergeant got out his long, straight-edged sword, and saluted, and asked for the will of his master, and Darrell said:

"I have come in the name of Wilbur, the son of John, and some others, who require the presence of the priestess in my chamber. Let her be brought out at once."

"Dost thou come, master, in the name of Wilbur, the son of John?" said the sergeant, looking bewildered.

"Yes," said Darrell.

"This is a mystery even in the mysterious mountain," said the sergeant. "For mine own eyes saw Wilbur, the son of John, enter the chamber of the priestess only ten minutes ago, and now he has sent you in his name to fetch her out."

Darrell's heart stood still.

"Has he melted through the walls of the solid rock?" muttered the sergeant.

However, he went to the door, and struck his heavy hand against it, then, turned the handle and thrust it wide. It revealed to Darrell the tall form and the white beard of Wilbur sitting at a small

table opposite the priestess, and in the midst of a grave discourse with her, his long arm extended to reinforce a point which he was just making.

The sergeant saluted him, saying, "The priestess is called for in thy name, master, and yet thou art here present with her."

Darrell was too numb to move. He wanted, he said afterward, to take to his heels and run like a child, but there were some faster feet than his nearby, and the soldiers were closing in, anxious to get at the heart of the mystery.

He only heard old Wilbur saying to the girl, "Your belief which is no belief, then, and your faith which is no faith—"

However, the old greybeard broke off, and came rapidly out into the corridor. He wore a long, sweeping robe, his long, thin hair fell in a cloud about his stern face and cramped shoulders. His feet were in loose slippers, with pointed toes, and his whole appearance was at once unkempt and grand.

Straight up to Darrell he stalked, and then he roared out in a voice of thunder, months of suspicion, and real dislike and distrust and rising hatred all breaking into his words:

"What fool calls in my name when I am already here? Or what villain art thou, then? And what is thy meaning?"

The fierce old man was enough to stun the eyes; but along with it, behind it, Darrell could not help seeing the form of his son, trussed like a beast for market, and lying in the recess of his room. Oh, the deaths that would be devised for all of us!

He saw those deaths burning in the eye of the seer—he felt the heat of flame and the grinding of steel through nerve and flesh and biting against the bone.

But with his mind still half fixed upon the thought of the imprisoned youth, he stepped closer to old Wilbur, the son of John, and said:

"My ancient and wise friend, come two steps with me. I have a word for you that concerns you."

"Concerns me?" said the terrible old man. "Nothing concerns me now, except to guess that thou art a villain!"

"Also," said Darrell, "it has to do with your clever son!" And he made himself sneer at Wilbur, the son of John.

The last speech, and the look that went along with it, unsettled the dignity and poise of the old man.

He swept the guards away with a gesture; he grabbed Darrell's shoulder and marched him three steps away down the hall.

"What dost thou mean when thou smiledst at the name of my son?" he asked.

"I MEAN," said Darrell, with a sudden heat of satisfaction, as he began to guess that he had found a winning card, "I mean that the sneaking rat was caught spying, and murdering, and that now he's lying tied and gagged in my room."

Old Wilbur might have fallen, but the wall was near him, and he put his hand against it.

Out of the corner of his eye, he glared at Darrell, muttering, "Never have I put faith in thee, thou dog! Never from the beginning! The fire should have eaten thee long ago, if my judgment had been taken!"

Darrell had recovered from his shock, by this time, and he could afford to smile with contempt and triumph at the older man.

"Now what do you say? Have I come in your name, demanding the priestess?"

"Thou art a rash and a foolish man," said old Wilbur. "What will come to thee hereafter from this—" He paused, and ground his teeth with rage and spite. But at length he muttered, "What dost thou gain from taking her?"

"Not from this cell, only," said Darrell, "but away from this whole cursed Smoking Land."

"This is madness," said Wilbur.

"I have come in your name, demanding the girl," repeated Darrell.

A groan of rage came from Wilbur's throat; he turned sharply around and roared at the soldiers, "Fools, dolts, blockheads, ye have received orders, and still ye stand? Out with the girl—the priestess—the fool—whatever she may be, and drive her down the corridor before us!"

They brought Sylvia out, however, with a sufficient reverence, and she saw before her the man who had confirmed her sentence of death—Cleve Darrell!

She could not realize, now, that this coming was through a feeling of friendship. She could only realize that death itself must now be only a step away from her. But her head went all the higher, and a faint smile came on her lips, and the color burned up in her devoted face.

And Darrell found himself thinking, "Oh, beautiful fool and martyr!"

The soldiers would have escorted the two dignitaries and the priestess, but Darrell said, "We walk alone!"

This halted them, and Wilbur, after a silent struggle, did not countermand the order.

They went on silently, the three of them, until they came to the door of Darrell's room, and he waved to Wilbur to enter. The old man hesitated.

"What do I find here?" said he.

"Your son," said Darrell.

"Thou hast murdered him!" said Wilbur, groaning in the depths of his throat.

"No," said Darrell. "He's still alive. Open the door, and you'll find him."

He merely said, "We hold a conference, then?"

"We confer," said Darrell. And he frowned, to keep himself from laughing for joy, for he was beginning to see his way clearly out of the impasse.

At any rate, what I inside the room, still talking to that venomous lad Arthur, first saw, was the tall form of Wilbur, the son of John, striding into the room like an angry fate.

My heart turned to water; but then I saw Darrell, also, and no soldiers guarding the party, and last and best of all, Sylvia! I got to her side in three steps and took hold of her hands, as Darrell closed the heavy door behind him.

"It is true, and you're here, and you shall not die, Sylvia!" said I.

"What thing hast thou said?" murmured the girl, looking gravely up to my face. "And dost thou speak it from certain knowledge or only from a tender heart?"

Other things were happening then, that broke even through the happiness of seeing her alive and sound, and free for that moment, at least.

Old Wilbur was in a grand tantrum at the odd sight of his son lying on the floor; and he had out a knife in a jiffy to

cut the cords, when Darrel stopped him with a grip that probably wasn't any too gentle. Wilbur straightened up and looked savagely at Darrell, and a second time at me.

"What treason is this?" he said.

"You can see the sort of treason for yourself, Wilbur," said Darrell. "Here's the pair of people you wanted to see die; you wanted to enjoy their agony. But you won't. They're both going free."

"Dost know, foolish fellow," said Wilbur, drawing himself up higher than before, and talking grandly down to Darrell, "dost know that the thing thou speakest may never be while there are men in the Smoking Land?"

"Dost *thou* know," said Darrell, in savage mockery, "that thou wilt lie flat on thy back in this room, gagged and tied like thy fine son, here, while the three of us walk freely out of the mountain, and sail away in one of the airships to our own country? Smoky, throw a gun on this old rat, will you?"

The touch of Westernism made everything seem easy and natural and simple, to me. I covered Wilbur with my gun.

"It was all lying—all lying!" he snarled, "when thou didst speak of thy devotion to the science which we nurse here—all the while thou yearned for thine own people!"

"Yes," said Darrell. "Every day I yearned for them. You and your gang of cutthroats, what could you mean to a decent man? Nothing but a chance to turn murder loose on the world. But you knew or guessed before this evening what I felt. You sent this whelp of yours to hunt me, and except for chance, he would have put a knife through my heart!"

"Alas, that he failed!" moaned Wilbur, son of John.

"Come up closer, Smoky," said Darrell. "That's right. Stick the gun into his ribs, and if he stirs, let him have a pair of bullets through him. Why I don't kill you out of hand, I don't know," he went on. "It's a part of the weakness of which you've accused all my people. The reason, you say, why the future would be benefited, if all of us were wiped off the face of the globe. But we won't be wiped off, Wilbur, son of John, and neither shall we be slaves to the Smoking Land. And

so, if you'll kindly excuse me, we'll leave you quietly here behind us."

As he spoke, he secured the old man's hands, and when Wilbur started to make answer, a balled-up handkerchief was jammed between his teeth, and cut his voice to a gurgling.

We soon stretched him out, tied until he couldn't wriggle, and then we looked at the bonds of Arthur.

"What wouldst thou do?" said Sylvia, looking gravely at me.

"We are taking you, Sylvia," said I, "to a southern land—to our own people, and away from eternal winter, and the smoking mountain, and the murder and fire that runs riot in this land. Will you come?"

"Ah," said she, "how may I go, when the goddess hath not spoken?"

I took so much pleasure in listening to her gentle voice, mind you, that I hardly comprehended what she was saying, but then I made out the words of Darrell, as he answered:

"You see, Sylvia, that we could not have come here, we could not even have dared to think of taking you away, if the goddess had not expressly inspired us. Who are we to do such things and defy the wise men, except through her strength?"

It was like the breaking of sunlight through clouds, to see the change in the girl's face. "Dost thou truly say so?" said she.

"Yes, we truly say so. How else can you imagine it yourself, Sylvia?" said Darrell.

"My mind turns, and is darkened," said Sylvia, "and yet there is something like a voice that speaketh within me, and saith that all may be well!"

And I knew, then and there, that her scruples were conquered. We did not linger.

Darrel picked up a quantity of clothes and wraps. I took the rifle and we stepped out into the long corridor, and went along its glimmering dimness, and between its polished walls, until we came to the first turning, and then far behind us, we heard a great clamor of blows, and looked back.

Through the faint twilight that filled the distant corridor, we could see armed men at the door of Darrell's room, beating

upon it with their sword-butts and fists. How long would it be before they were inside?

## CHAPTER 26

### Escape Us Never

**E**VEN Sylvia was not so unfamiliar with life and danger that she failed to recognize what we were in for. She began to run, and I was amazed. What with the rifle, the heavy ammunition belt, and other things, I found it hard to keep up with her; she went like a deer. And Darrell was close behind.

I wondered if Darrell had locked the door when he came out. And if it was made solidly enough to withstand a battering. And furthermore, after banging on it a couple of times, if the guards would take it for granted that no one was inside and go away?

Fear is more exhausting than physical effort; I was winded and shaking when we came toward a lighted end of a passage where several guards were stationed. I would have turned back, but Darrell made a sign to go on.

He took the lead. And we walked straight up to the soldiers, the girl drawing a hood almost entirely across her face. And she came closer to me, and put a hand on my arm. I felt the tremor in that hand, and heard the depth of her breathing. And yet I think that she was steadier than I!

When we reached them, a pair of halberds were crossed in our path. "Where goest thou?" said the man in command.

Murder sat down before us, and lolled out his long, red tongue. I was glad of him; he seemed to give a casual aspect to our whole party. He turned us into mere strollers.

"We go to the airships," said Darrell.

"Ah?" says the other. "And by what authority?"

"By my own authority," said Darrell, while my breath stopped again. "And by the authority of the chief of the wise men," he added. "Dost thou know this signet?"

He held out a ring. Oh, wise Darrell, to have taken that ring from Wilbur, the son of John!

One of the soldiers came up and peered in my face, and then stared at the girl. "Here is one in the robes of the priestess!" says he. "Look now, if she is not exactly dressed as the priestess!"

"She is," said another, "but we know that the priestess Sylvia hath not her liberty now."

The officer of the guard was turning the ring back and forth in his hand, but now he nodded. "Yes," he said, "I recognize it. But hath he given thee no writing?"

"If he had taken time to write me an order," said Darrell, impatiently, "would he have entrusted his own signet to me? Go to, friend! Where are thy wits?"

I thought that he might have taken another moment for baiting the soldier, but the latter, after he had scowled blackly at Darrell, finally nodded and stepped back.

"Open the door," he commanded. And instantly what had seemed a blank wall of rock at the end of the passage opened, sliding back with a dull rumbling sound. We were stepping through when the officer called out:

"Halt, there!"

We halted; my blood curdled.

"Thou mayest pass with the signet, but now what of these two? And what are their names? And wherefore go they with thee? One of them is a woman!"

"I have eyes, it is true," said Darrell. "And I have a brain, also. Dost thou think that I have brought these by chance, or from intention?"

The man growled like an angry dog, and muttered something, but we went on, and he finally roared out, "Take them to the runways!"

And a pair of men unarmored, and dressed like laborers, came along with us. "What wilt thou have?" said one of them.

"The ship which is most ready to fly," said Darrell.

At this, both of the men paused. "Aye, but we have no order to give thee a ship," said one.

"Look," said Darrell, showing the ring. "Is there a higher order than this signet?"

The older of the two bent his head over it. He looked like a Chinese, with a broad

face, high in the cheekbones, and he had a drooping moustache, six hairs to a side.

"Well," he said, "I for one like it not!"

"Neither did the captain like it," said Darrell, "but thou didst see him obey!"

At that the man nodded and grunted. "Well," he said, "it is not a thing to take a chance about. But neither is the signet of Wilbur the son of John a light thing. Therefore we go on—"

And again I breathed, and we went on behind the pair, opening two doors, and presently we stepped into a long, low chamber into which was fitted, almost like a cigar in its wrapper, a thing shaped like a torpedo, if you can imagine a torpedo sixty feet long, and on top and below, were projections like fins. Behind, it flattened out into a tail. It looked ready to slide without effort through either air or water!

Darrell went up to it in the most casual way. "Open the exit door," said he, and turning a knob in the side of the silver ship, he opened a door, and Sylvia and I climbed into a little cabin furnished all about with small windows, and, looking straight ahead, I could see the dorsal fin of the airship straight before us, sweeping backward in a curve, something like the fin of a killer whale.

How sleek and swift the curve of that top surface looked, and how it gleamed, pearl gray, in the soft light that filled the chamber.

Darrell, climbing in after us, gave me one look—and never have I seen more burning joy, and the will to do. He sat down in the foremost of the two broad seats, and began to work at some levers, hauling on this one and depressing that until a tremor passed through the body of the air boat.

In the meantime, just as the ship came to life, as it were, and was capable of movement, I saw the barrier before us roll back, and looked out at what appeared a leaden gray wall of mist. But I knew it was the outer air, seen by me for the first time since I had entered the heart of the smoking mountain.

"Ready!" said Darrell, through his teeth.

And now, under us, as the tremor of the ship increased, I heard a rushing noise, like the pulsing sound of a stream

heard down wing. It grew much louder.

We began to move—the side walls were creeping by us and the nose of the ship approaching the entrance, when I heard a loud shouting, and saw a form rush out of a side door, throwing up his hands.

I saw him—and then I saw blackness of night. For it was the captain of the last guard, and he was screeching, "Shut the entrance gate. Shut it, even if the accursed ship is crushed within its jaws. Treason! Treason!"

To the right of the gate, on the verge of liberty and escape, I saw one of the workmen seize a long lever and pull—and the vast barrier slid a yard outwards to block our way!

And then I did what I never had done before. I shot at a human being. And, mind you, with as little compunction, and with as great a calm as I would have shot at a rabbit.

**I**T DID not seem to be a man, really, who stood there hauling away at the lever; it was more like a mechanism that was preparing to entomb us and give us over to frightful death.

Well, at any rate, I opened the door of the cabin, leaned out, and smashed a forty-five caliber bullet straight through the poor devil's body. The impact slammed him against the wall.

The other mechanic, instead of seizing the lever, turned and ran for his life. I don't blame him, because he could guess that I was no more in the humor to miss a second target than I had the first.

But now I had something else on my mind. For a flicker of light came under my eyes, and then the shining length of a sword, and a strong hand behind it, and behind that the powerful arm of the captain of the guard. He shouted, "Death to traitors!" and rammed the point of his weapon straight against my breast.

There was enough push in that thrust to drive me far back into the cabin, but I was not hurt. No, the point of that heavy rapier simply crumpled against the cuirass which I was wearing, and shards of steel fell glittering from me.

It was a strange feeling—like a taste of immortality. I think that I know, after that, how the armored paladins of Cortez

felt when the brave Aztecs rushed on them in waves, and the glass blades of their war axes shattered to bits against the good Spanish steel of helmet and breastplate.

But now the quivering length of the ship was gathering speed; the hissing, rushing sound beneath us increased, the walls slipped more rapidly past us, and finally, like the leap of an animal which had been crouching, we shot from the hall, and sprang into the very center of the leaden sky!

That was how it seemed to me, as I watched. But then I saw that it was not the sky at all. It was on a level or even dipping line that we had traveled, and the ragged jaws of a set of hills appeared straight before us.

I looked at Darrell who was struggling with a lever. He groaned; and the nose of the speeding boat turned slowly downward!

I had lived through many heart-crushing instants on my strange journey—but none so terrible as this, for death stood close to us then, and laughed at us.

## CHAPTER 27

### Crash!

**W**E WERE not at full speed. No, we were just dawdling along at a trifling hundred and forty or fifty miles an hour; but that would be sufficient to crumple the entire ship like a paper bag smashed flat between a pair of hands.

I yelled out, "D'you know the controls?"

Darrel said nothing. I saw the bulge of his jaw, and the gleam of sweat on his face as he reached for another lever. Plainly he was simply guessing, and we were two seconds from eternity!

So I threw in my own guess and grabbed a lever on which his left hand was already resting, and pushed it forward. Promptly that turned the nose almost straight down toward the ground. I yanked it back frantically, and the nose of the ship flew up again.

I almost felt the belly of the silver boat scraping against the ground, but then we flew away with terrible speed right at the hills, then high above them. . . .

I got Darrel by the shoulder; we were

laughing like a pair of hysterical maniacs. Laughing, and yelling, and beating one another, while we hurled through the air. For southward, southward was freedom!

I got Darrell out of the driver's seat and took it myself. No matter how brilliantly he had engineered our escape, I felt a little more capable of handling that silver cigar as it shot through the sky. And what a thing it was!

In five minutes of experimenting I knew about the controls well enough. And in those five minutes, we saw the smoking mountain dwindle behind us, and shrink smaller and smaller, receding into the horizon; and then, beneath us, a gleaming line of white rushed away behind—the breakers shattering against the cliffs.

I remember that Murder, with a whine, stood up and put his forepaws against the glass of the cabin door, and Darrell pulled him back, for fear he should press on the catch that held the door shut. We did not want the blast of a three hundred mile wind cutting in through that open door and tossing us about like paper in a gale!

And now, looking back, the Smoking Land was already no more than a dull mist, mounting slowly upward; and beneath us were the fields of drifting ice, and spots of leaden water. Then I began to play with that air boat.

Imagine yourself encased in the handle of a javelin, and hurled at the stars by the hand of a giant—that was how it felt to drive across the universe in the silver ship!

I dipped her down to the surface of the sea, until we actually heard the growling and the roaring of a pressure ridge, and saw the great blue-white blocks of ice shooting up, and piling into mountains.

Then I shot the ship in a long, screaming line up through the lower masses of clouds, and up through the higher layers, until we were speeding through a sky of luminous milk, as it were, and then higher, higher, till it turned a bright, springlike blue.

We shot along at that level. I would have played more tricks with the ship, but Darrell was strongly against it. He was for taking a high position, a straight line to the south, and hanging there until

we saw America on the horizon. Then and only then I could play as many tricks as I pleased.

I asked him what it was he feared; and he said that this might not be their fastest ship; it might not even be in the fastest squad! At this, I laughed. I gave the air boat full speed, and she shuddered from end to end.

I dipped down to the highest level of the clouds; they made me think of the blinding white surface of a road in the dust of midsummer.

"Why, Cleve," I told Darrell, "I could overtake a streak of lightning with this trick. I could pass an arrow and bump a thrown stone out of the way. I could put on a first baseman's mitt and catch cannonballs fired after me. You don't realize how fast we're going, man! Look at that cloud—zing! —and now were through it. There's another—no, it's behind us. This is *traveling*, boy!"

He laughed at my enthusiasm, and so did Sylvia. But her laughter was small and short.

She was shrinking in a corner of the rear seat, staring out of a window, and looking very much like a frightened child on the first day of school.

Poor Sylvia! I left the comforting of her to Darrell, and I thought that he made out very well—almost too well. He was letting the airship and our southern course go hang—and he was telling her about life on the range.

I never realized how deep his love of the West had been. Science could go rip, he said, from now on, and what he wanted was a chance to fork a horse, and canter along over range, and look from the ledges into the box canyons that walk down from the center of the sky to the plains below. He wanted to smell wood-smoke under a wet sky, and to face a blizzard, and to broil in the sun, and to eat venison of his own shooting, and to put dogs on the trail of a bear—

Dogs and bear—she could understand them—but horses—summer suns—starry skies—were all new to her. I never realized how hard description is, until I heard Darrell trying to tell her about a horse, and not getting very far with it. About all he could say was that it was an animal with legs at the four corners—

long legs. But that description would do for a dog, as well.

However, he got her interested in the range, I must say, though she asked, before the end, "Suppose that I should wish to come back, some day, to the Smoking Land?"

"And why not?" said Darrell. "There'll be this air boat, and at such speed as this, you could jump up here in nine or ten hours—just a nice little overnight sleeper, so to speak. And then, when you've shaken hands with the wise men, and warmed your hands at the fire, you can come back again, unless they flay you alive and put you in the snow, or burn you to death, or play some other little trick."

"You know, Sylvia, that Wilbur, the son of John, intended to have the fire on the altar burn very slowly, when you were thrown into it. He was going to have it burn off your legs, first, and then—" He stopped.

The girl was exclaiming, angrily, "But he could not control the fire. No matter how much he might hate me, he couldn't control the fire, for all of that is in the will of the goddess, only."

"And the personal enemies of Wilbur, the son of John—they don't have a worse time than the others in the fire?" asked Darrell. She started to answer, and then stopped, suddenly, and fell into a brown study. "You see," said Darrell, rather cruelly, "perhaps the goddess would listen specially hard when the great Wilbur whispered in her ear?"

I think the girl understood the irony well enough; but she looked straight before her, with her eyes full of pain, and said nothing. Perhaps for the first time her faith was receiving a severe shock.

Darrell let up on the subject, and a moment later we had something else to occupy our minds. For he called out to me: "Smoky, look behind you."

I looked behind, saw Sylvia, smiled at her, and then through the rear window of the cabin I saw a silver pencil standing in the sky.

**S**TANDING in the sky, and pointing toward us. Now, it was not alone, but to the left and right the Arctic sun was gleaming on a line of half a dozen such pencils.

Yes, they were far away, but in the few moments during which I kept my eyes upon them, they drew nearer and bigger.

I was in a trance. I could not believe it. But now I could realize that Darrell had been right. This air boat was not the fastest in the Smoking Land. It was not even the fastest type!

No, those other silver fish, as they swam nearer through the air, seemed leaner—with more reach in the nose and more taper in the tail—than the lines of our own ship. And certainly they were nearing us rapidly.

I said to Darrell, "What can they do? One aircraft can't ram another! Do they get up close and use their blunderbusses?"

"All they'll do," said Darrell, "is to take a position over your head and drop a little bomb that will blow us into a beautiful pink mist."

"That's a neat idea," said I. "Have we anything to throw back?"

"Not a thing that I can find." He was rummaging through a storage pit in the back.

"Then what do we do?" I asked.

"Try to dodge them?" he suggested.

"We could dodge one of them a few times. We can't dodge six."

"That's true," he agreed. "Then we'll have to run to earth like a fox."

I turned and gave Sylvia a long glance, and she looked back at me, and the pain went out of her eyes, and a smile came dimly into them.

Perhaps I was not much to her, but I was something, at least. I realized that after our interchange of glances, and it made the grim chance that lay ahead for all three of us seem a smaller thing, just then.

So I dipped the nose of the craft and down we shot, through gleaming, milky clouds, through leaden dark ones beneath, and so into view of the glimmering waste of the Arctic Ocean.

I saw stretches of ice miles across, but every bit of it, as we skimmed closer, was rough and jagged.

But we had to try to land somewhere before those sharks of the air above and behind us had dived down and gotten us in view.

So I picked the place—a sheet of drifting ice perhaps a mile in diameter, heaped

with a great mound of broken ice at one side. The other side looked open and fairly smooth.

Down we skimmed. I knew something about the proper way to land an airplane, but this shooting bullet was a different matter. We skimmed closer and closer. I shut off the engines; there was only the hiss and rush of the wind outside the craft. We slowed; we staggered in the air; and then we struck with a mighty crash!

## CHAPTER 28

### The Ice Cave

I WAS thrown against the side of the cabin with a force that knocked me senseless. I came to as Darrell and the girl hauled me out by the legs. And then I stood, staggering and dazed, and saw the crumpled wreck of the air boat beside us.

Well, I had been luckier than I knew, for we were not five feet from the edge of the ice sheet. Another fraction of an instant and we would have rolled into the icy sea—have settled slowly to the bottom.

In fact, the ship was still shuddering a little, sliding down the slope of the ice. We had just time to yank out the robes and rifle; and then the silver bullet of the sky dipped over the rim of the ice sheet, crashed softly into the water, and dipped out of sight.

Darrell had me by the arm. "We're out of the frying pan," he said, "but we're into the fire, my lad. There they come, the little beauties!"

Yes, there they were, all six of them, sliding through the sky like bright fish through still water.

"Will they see us?"

"They have the finest optical glass in the world," said Darrell, as calm as ever. "But they won't be able to make a landing here, I think. You picked out about the only possible spot, and even this was only good enough to wreck us."

It was true.

As I looked about, I could see that what had appeared a fairly smooth surface of ice was really a mass of broken ice rubble. This whole field was the remnant of a greater body that had been twisted and broken in a great jam. In making the landing, we had managed to slow down the

ship greatly, and then, as we struck the rough ice, it had ripped out the belly of the boat, and that had served as a sort of brake, softening the final shock.

For once I was glad of the angry face of the Arctic Ocean, leaden dark, except where its waves curled and whitened at the head, and gave spray to the whistling wind. They would not be apt to choose that sea as a landing place.

"And there in the pressure ridge," said Darrell, "we may be able to get to some sort of shelter from their bombs. That's what they'll try to do—pot us from above!"

We ran for the white, ruined hill of ice. I suppose that we were almost the first humans in the history of the world who were really glad to see a ridge of pressure ice! Stumbling over the rough places, and sliding on the smooth, we headed for that great white junk heap.

I had to help Sylvia. She had no foot-sense for ice, and no wonder—her life had been lived, almost since childhood, within the smoking mountain. But I got on with her, keeping the rifle and a small portion of the pack, while Darrell accepted the lion's share of the burden.

We were making good progress, and the distance was not great. But above us in the air followed hunting hounds which could run a mile in nine or ten seconds. And now they were sliding down at us. They did not seem to be coming very fast; they were loafing as leisurely as hawks cutting their way down the wind. Only when the silver airships came closer could I see how they were leaping through space.

And now I heard a strange, high-pitched scream—the sound of the craft as they tore through the air—and no sound of engines at all. They were circling, as though to find possible landing places. I had thought, two hours before, that we were leaving the Smoking Land behind us forever. But now the gloomy picture of the place rolled nearer and nearer in my mind's eye.

Even Sylvia's iron nerve gave way a little. She threw up a hand before her face and cried out faintly. I had to guide her as she ran on at Darrell's heels.

We saw, a moment later, with just what fangs those hounds of the sky were garnished. Something flew past my head with

a whir like a cannon ball ripping the air. It was shooting forward on a long slant, and, hitting the ice fifty feet from us, it exploded with terrific force.

All three of us were knocked flat and skidding. The air filled with chunks of ice big enough to smash us to bits, but luck saved us. And then, scampering to our feet and running on again, we saw that the bomb had blown a great hole right through the ice sheet; we could see the water slopping up around the sides of it!

I DON'T think that we had more than fifty yards to go to the heaps of vast ice boulders that might give us shelter from the bombs. And Murder was there before us, capering and prancing and howling to us to come faster on our wretched pairs of legs. We did our best, but the men of the Smoking Land were giving it to us hot and fast.

The second bomb dropped right at Darrell's feet and I thought we were gone. But it did not explode. It had smashed into the ice with terrific force, and cracked right open, like an apple, but it did not blast us to bits. Something was wrong with it.

It gave me a feeling that fate would fight for us, in this pinch.

Flash, flash, flash! Like sword-strokes the silver boats glided over us, and the bombs came. Three of them exploded almost in an instant, not far from us, and we were flattened.

Sylvia and I managed to get up, at once, though we were staggering drunkenly. And then we saw that Darrell lay still, with his arms outspread, and a streak of blood down his face. I was sure he was dead, but we caught him by the heels, Sylvia and I, and ran on, dragging him. Murder came and helped, putting his teeth in Darrell's coat and tugging more than Sylvia and I put together.

It was Murder, too, who led us straight to the proper spot. The entrance hole was so small, but we managed to push Darrell through and get in behind him, creeping down a narrow, low tunnel about which the gigantic blocks of ice were piled. They looked as though they had been shaped and squared in a quarry, and were lying there ready to build the palace of

some king of the ice. Here was our shelter.

Inside the tunnel, there was a greater space, perhaps five feet high, of the same width and about nine or ten feet in length. It made close quarters for the three of us and the dog. We worked over Darrell, and waited for thunder to burst outside the shelter we were in. And the thunder was bursting, all right.

Those dogs of the air were right after us, and having seen us take to the earth, they were doing their best to scratch us out again. Just as Darrell sat up, they slammed the ice hill with six bombs in succession, and such a roaring and crashing I've never heard. Each bomb seemed to multiply its uproar, sending the sound deafeningly down to the roots of the pile.

It was not one attack that they made, but many. For at least an hour, they pounded that hill of ice, and during that hour, they must have dropped well over a hundred bombs.

We sat about, stuffing our fingers into our ears. Our eyes began to jump out of our heads. I really think that a little more of it would have driven us completely mad.

Finally silence dropped, and spread over us in wave after wave of blessedness. And then we were able to breathe freely.

Darrell, whose head had been merely grazed, finally said, "I think it's over. They've either turned back to the Smoking Land, or else they've landed somewhere, and will come to dig us out by hand. We'd better do a little exploring, Smoky."

I sent Murder down the passage, and started on behind him, but presently I heard him scratching; and then the most frightfully lugubrious howl welled up out of his throat and throttled me with its horror.

Then he came backing out.

I retreated, and the two of us came back into the little dugout.

We knew perfectly well, all of us, what Murder had found. The bombs of the men from the Smoking Land had not blown our hill of ice to bits, but they had toppled some ponderous boulders across our line of retreat. We were buried alive!

**W**HEN we knew what had happened to us, total resignation appeared in Sylvia's face. She said nothing. She

needed to say nothing, for I understood perfectly that she was saying to herself that the arm of the goddess was long and strong and sure.

Darrell went down the blocked passage in his turn. He came back, saying that he estimated we had crawled in about twenty feet to the central widening of the rift in the ice. Of the twenty feet, about eight, he thought, were now blocked. We could try to pick our way out—it was the only thing to do. We went to work.

We each had one of the knives from the Smoking Land, and never was the temper of steel better tested! The butt of my revolver was our hammer, and the long blade of the dagger, the chisel. We could not drive that fragile blade very deeply into the ice lest we snap it off. We went at it slowly, taking from the face of the ice a small chip with every stroke. These chips were scraped to the rear and pushed back into the little cave.

Imagine the frightful slowness of the work and the strain of the position which we were forced to work in! About half an hour of it was all we could stand at a time. Then we'd switch places and rest.

Sylvia took her turn. She did even more than her share, and I think that in one of her shifts she broke twice as much ice as Darrell or I, partly because of her wonderful patience and her precision of touch, and partly because she was so much smaller that she was more at ease in the shaft.

We worked on steadily for twenty-four hours, and in that time we pushed through about six feet of the ice. According to Darrell's rough calculation, there should remain only about two or three feet of ice ahead of us, but, as he himself now pointed out, it was very possible that the falling ice had spread out in a broad apron beyond the point at which we'd originally entered.

In the meantime, we were nearly frozen in spite of the excellent furs that Darrell's foresight had provided for us, and the air was gradually fouling. For twenty-four hours, we had been working steadily, and therefore breathing deeply, and now the air was so bad that the one of us who was resting lay with closed eyes in our ice cell, half dying from sheer lack of oxygen.

Darrell and I felt it much more than the girl. At least, she showed it less, and

worked longer and longer shifts. She felt that we were doomed, and that the voice of the goddess had decided against us. The only reason that she worked so enthusiastically was that she wished to do her part.

It was Darrell whose patient brain refused to despair. His eyes sank back in his head, and his face took on a ghastly color.

My head was spinning; I was constantly dizzy, and suffered horrible nausea like the worst kind of seasickness. A chill was growing throughout my body, spreading with every moment. But when Darrell finally, without a word, picked up my rifle, I felt that I understand what he was about.

He saw that we had come to the end. This tomb of gloomy ice would hold our bodies until the island melted into the sea.

Darrell crawled out into the passage. And the girl, with a startled look in her eyes, stretched out a hand to point solemnly after him.

I merely nodded in dark agreement with the thought that was in her eyes. And I think that she would have cried out to Darrell, but the heavy sound of the rifle's explosion now came roaring back into our ears.

I looked at the girl, and she at me. There was no sound from Darrell. I only wondered that he should have used the rifle for the job, when a revolver shot would have been so much handier.

Then I took out the old Colt. "Sylvia," said I, "it looks like the end of the trail. Darrell is right. He's always right. He's ended the business. And we'd better do the same thing. If you don't know very well how to use a gun, I'll—"

My voice trailed away. But she understood, and she answered, "If the goddess impels you, do as you please."

"SYLVIA," said I, "whether your goddess exists or not, it seems to me a devilish freak of bad chance that brought me to the Smoking Land, to find you, and bring you out as far as this toward my own country, and then to blot us out, like this, shut up in a handful of ice."

"It is the will of the goddess," said the girl. "To try to understand her ways is to bring madness to the brain."

"Sylvia," said I, "if you have any last thing to say, speak it now."

She looked me straight in the face.

"I have nothing to say but this," said Sylvia. "I had rather die, having seen thee, than to have lived without thee."

"Then, Sylvia," said I, "you've known that I love you?"

"Yes," said she. "For a long time. Though it is not many hours since we first met."

I kissed her, and then hardened my heart. "Are you ready, Sylvia?" said I.

"Ready," said she, smiling quietly.

The revolver was like a load on my heart. But now, as I lifted it, I heard a sound of stirring—not from Murder, who lay stone stiff, as if dead in his corner, but from Darrell, in the passage.

And now, as I dropped the revolver, amazed, he backed out of the tunnel and showed me a face to which the color had returned and eyes that were normal once more.

"The bullet went through," said he, as I stared.

I blinked. "Don't you taste the air?" said he.

Then I understood! What a stupid, melodramatic fool I felt. A thin ray of fresh air, like a ray of light, touched my face, through the acrid odor of the burned powder. And I fairly thrust Sylvia into the tunnel.

I could imagine her with her lips pressed to the opening—a narrow opening, indeed, but one through which a man could drink life. Then she came back and I, with my eyes bursting out of my head, crawled to take my place there.

There were three hours of work remaining before us, but from the moment that the fresh air began to come through, we were renewed completely. And again, Sylvia set the pace for us, doing almost more than the two of his combined.

Darrell's steel had gone through the outer wall, as his triumphant shout told us, when I turned to Sylvia and said:

"A while ago, Sylvia, when it seemed about the end of life, you may have said more than you meant to say. And now, with one smile, even, you can unsay it all, and I'll forget that you ever spoke at all."

She answered, "There's not a word or a

thought that I would take back. For now we have passed through death, and this is a new life, perhaps, for thee and me!"

A new life? I thought it was already the center of heaven, as at last we worked our way out into the open; and the dull Arctic sky, through which the clouds were scudding low, seemed to me more beautiful than the blue of paradise itself.

## CHAPTER 29

### Fauna

**WE HAD** an exhibition of the power of the practical and scientific mind the minute we got outside. We looked at the ridge of pressure ice and saw that half of it, toward the place where we had found our shelter, had been blasted partly away, and was still covered with what looked like a dry crystal dust. That was a sufficient testimony of the power of those bombs.

The sky showed none of the silver fish swimming through the air. When we made sure of that, Darrell said, "We have three jobs ahead of us. The first one is to orient ourselves as well as we can. The second is to contrive some means of travel. The third is to make a start for home."

"Yes, either by flying, or by walking the waves, I suppose."

"We have to eat, first, and you're the only experienced seal hunter in this outfit. I'll contribute matches and a primus stove."

He had, in fact, stuffed a number of the fur robes into what looked like tin, but was in reality a bit of good wrought iron, hammered thin. I breathed a sigh of relief.

It was forty hours and more since we had tasted food. I tightened my belt and started off at a brisk pace, making a round of the island. I went two miles to the end of it, and there I saw not one seal, but a herd of them—a whole half dozen on the ice and well in from the water!

It seemed too good to be true, through I don't suppose it was surprising that I should have found seals here on our ice island, seeing that there was no other ice in sight.

However, to hunt even a sleeping seal is not the easiest trick in the world. A

seal closes both eyes when he sleeps but you never can tell when he will open them and pop his head up and look around. So many of his ancestors have wound up in the bellies of polar bears that the seal never gets bear-paws very far out of mind. Fear is bred into him. This constant restlessness as he sleeps is a hard thing for a hunter to get past. But there is a way of doing it.

When you spot your seal, you can march right up to within about four hundred yards of him. That's as far as his big, unlucky eyes can see. From that point on, you get down and crawl, and as you crawl, you time him.

You may have a two-minute fellow, in which case you're in luck, or more likely you have one that stays quiet only twenty or thirty seconds. But if you time his first nap, you know exactly how long he will take on all of his others. When he drops his head and shuts his eyes, you may crawl straight on toward him. But when it's time for him to pop up and take notice again, you flatten yourself out on the ice and stay quiet.

However, the time comes when you are so close that even a weak-eyed seal can see you quite clearly, and then your job becomes complicated. It's not so bad if you're on ice, but it's a tricky business when you're hunting a seal who is by a breathing hole. He's probably lying only a few yards from the rim of it, and when you shoot, his own blood runs out and makes the ice slick and slippery, and there's usually enough of a slope to make his body slide down into the sea. Many a one I've caught by a flipper as it disappeared, only to have it glide out of my hand and disappear, sinking slowly down to gladden some killer whale.

In order to get close, and very close, so you can run in with a few steps and finish off your seal, you have to play seal yourself. The seal has only two ideas. A moving object on the ice is either a bear or another seal. It is probably a bear if it is whitish in color. It is probably a seal if it is dark; but it must be further identified by seal tricks.

So you must strain your head upward when the seal is rolling a suspicious eye at you, and then you must roll on the ice, from time to time, or tie yourself into long

knots, scratching fleas after seal fashion.

This time the job was pretty simple. I just had to work along between the little herd of seals and the nearest water edge. From that position, if they were still unalarmed when I started to shoot, I might even bag all six before they could get to the water. So when I was about four hundred yards from the herd, I got down on hands and knees and crawled along, and when I was still closer, I wormed my way along, seal fashion.

**I**T WAS a lot more difficult to hunt six than to hunt one. Because this was not a regular herd; these fellows seemed to be together only by accident. In a regular herd, watch will be kept, probably, by one or two duly appointed members, while the others enjoy a good snooze, but all six of these fellows were popping up their heads, and there were few times when I could catch them all with their heads down.

It was while I was lying prone, playing seal, and pretending to scratch fleas with my elbows, that I first saw the killer whales. There was a whole school of them—a dozen, I should say, and by the look of the long dorsal fins cutting the water, they were all adults.

That made me feel perfectly certain of my seals. They had seen those fins cutting the water, I could be sure, and much as they feared bears on land, they feared killer whales in the sea still more.

*Orca Gladiator*, to call him by his dressed-up name, thinks nothing of swallowing half a dozen seals one after the other. He swims like a streak; he has a pair of jaws capable of smashing a small boat with one bite; and he fears nothing in the seas except the great sperm whale.

I watched the long fins cutting the water with a hiss of spray about them, and a moment later, I decided that I had reached the right spot. I was beginning to feel a touch of pity for those poor seals, seeing that they had rifles to face on shore, and devils waiting for them in the water.

I gave one look toward the sea, and saw that the whales had disappeared and raised myself to one knee, ready for fast and accurate shooting.

But I did not pull the trigger. For just then it seemed as if a salvo of cannons had

been fired from the bottom of the sea. The ice broke up all around me, with a great roaring and smashing sound, and up through the broken ice, close to the seals, shot the projectiles that had smashed the thin sheet—the killer whales!

I saw thirty gleaming feet of one of them go into the air with that vast stretch of mouth closing on the body of a seal. I saw the red spurt of that seal's blood. And then the whole school went down out of sight. But still, as I leaped frantically from one block of ice to another, trying to get back to the main island, those nightmares rushed half a body's length out of the water to get a luckless seal. Sometimes they missed and turned in midair to snap at another.

It was frightful; and I was right in the middle of it. I might not be a seal, but I knew that the appetite of *Orca Gladiator* does not pause for such fine distinctions.

I had just jumped from one bobbing little iceberg and managed to get on the verge of a much more substantial chunk when a gleaming, dripping giant shot up, and a vast mouth clapped together scant inches from my head. I heard the gush of air expelled by the clapping of those jaws, and I saw the tiger gleam in the eye of the killer as it threw itself at me.

Into the water beyond me he crashed, and threw up a mass of spray all over me, and drenched me to the skin. On hands and knees in the middle of my ice cake, I remained sweating and trembling, clinging sickly to the glassy surface.

The killer did not try me again and I did not stay long on my little floe. I started hopping again from one to another, using the rifle as a balancing staff. And in a moment more, very weak in the knees, very giddy in the head, I stood again on the rim of the island.

Even there I did not pause, but ran as fast as I could straight inland. For one of the *Orcas*, or the whole school of them, might decide to top off seal-meat with man's flesh, and I preferred to stay away from that particular banquet.

I sat down and got some of the shudders out of me; it was bitterly cold. And though sea water drying and freezing on your body is not so deadly as fresh water, still it's bad enough.

So I turned and started back at a fast

stride. By this time, I had reached the rim of the piled ice blocks of the ridge. Then I heard a slight scuffling sound behind me and there, rearing head and shoulders over a great, polished square of ice, was a polar bear, and a whopper, at that!

I looked at him, as I got my rifle to my shoulder, but he, the scoundrel, merely turned his red eye toward the sea.

Oh, and I understood very well. He was simply measuring the distance to the edge of the water, and making sure that no "seal" in the world could escape him so far from water. That happy thought must have been in his heart still, when I sent a hard-nosed bullet to the same place.

That day we ate bear's meat and found it tough, but good.

## CHAPTER 30

### Back to Earth

**A**FTER that we started in a regular program of labor. In the first place, we never could tell when the silver fish from the Smoking Land might appear in the sky, and therefore we built ourselves an ice house on the edge of the wreckage of the pressure ridge. That would probably keep us from being seen by spies from the wise men of the Ice Pole. And we had double need of a good shelter, by this time, because the wind, pulling around until it blew dead from the north, or a bit west of north, increased to hurricane force and raged like a fiend.

It was one of those Arctic storms that one finds but rarely in life. We could make very little progress outside the shelter. As a matter of fact, we gave up trying, very largely, except to make trips to the carcass of the bear.

On the third day I found four seals on the ice, and I managed to shoot the lot.

Even more than their value as an extra supply of food, the four seal skins were a godsend in other ways. We spent most of the remaining week of the storm in working those hides, fire-drying them, rubbing a horrible compost of brains and fat into them, and making our noses impervious to bad odors as we toiled in our confined little tannery.

We got the hides rubbed and thinned

down and cured as well as we could. We wanted them light and strong. Strength we could not, of course, give to them by such hasty curing, but at last we had them at such a point that we could begin to shape them for the covering of our sled-boat.

We had arranged a sled, and a pretty good sled, too. At least, it had the most indestructible runners that ever were used in the Arctics. Those runners were the two halves of my cuirass and the two halves of the cuirass worn by Darrell. And the runners were held together by a curious combination of seal and bear bones, and much excellent sinew. It was not a pretty sled to look at, and it was never a sled to run true and straight, but it was fairly light and, as I have said before, it was almost indestructible—at least in its running parts. We had sewed the sealskins together with needles fashioned from bone and dried tendons for thread, to make cover for it, but when I looked at the meager dimensions of our sled and thought of it covered with the skins, I could not help shaking my head. It would be loaded to craziness with three humans and a huge dog, surely!

Darrell said that it probably would do very well. He said that if our sewing had been water-tight enough, we should get on very well, and he figured out, with an intricate drawing and a great deal of higher mathematics, that our boat, loaded to a safe water line, would carry eight hundred and fifty pounds, or eleven hundred, if it were sunk an inch or two deeper.

Every minute during the storm-bound days, we were constantly employed, and that was what kept us well, I dare say.

But the moment the scream of the wind let up, we had something else to think of, for our ice island hit a great mass of other ice and promptly broke up. Not into little bits, but into chunks the size of a room.

It was horribly topsy-turvy, to sit on the top of our iceberg and see other lumps, perhaps ten times as big as ours, staggering this way, and rolling that. It was a nightmare.

However, the wind was still from the north, and though it was not strong, it drifted our bit of ice wreckage toward the rim of the great sheet.

As far as we could see, this sheet extended, and Darrell brought my heart into my throat by saying, "My son, this is the ice barrier along the coast, or I'll eat your hat!"

"Coast? Coast, Darrell?" I gasped.

"Look here," he said. "The Smoking Land is about eight hundred miles from Point Barrow. We came on a beeline in the airship for two hours—that must have been around six hundred miles. Then we struck this big hump of luck, and for ten days we've had a whizzing devil of a wind behind us. I don't know how the currents are moving well down under the surface, but I'm sure that the entire surface waters must have been flowing south under the beat of that wind.

"More than that, the ridge ice must have caught the wind almost like a sail, and that would help to drive us. In fact, old son, we might be not more than a hundred miles from the Point at this moment."

I listened to him as to a madman's happy ravings. I thought of my long eight months at sea, and though it was true that I did not have any airship to help me over the worst part of my journey, still I could not take into my mind the possibility that we were so close to the end of real trouble.

**I**N THE meantime, we got ready for our landing, and made it easily enough, with Murder leaping back and forth from one lip of the ice to another.

We rigged our sled, and harnessed Murder and ourselves to it. Then we headed south again.

We marched all day through the still air, and we made good time, because that ice was as level as a meadow, most of the time. But then the going got worse and worse. And we came, finally, to a big range of ice hills.

We looked at them with joy. It might mean simply the scar left by a grand collision of two ice masses in the open sea. But we felt more certain that it was the barrier ice—the pressure ice of the coast, where solid land meets the thrust of sheets that may have blown south from the pole!

It was a great, rumpled, broken succession of ruined ice fields. And even when we climbed to the top ridges, and strained

our eyes, we were so blanketed about with mist that we could see nothing far before us.

We spent another day getting across that broken field, and then we found ourselves, with inexpressible joy, on the shore of the land. Was it merely an island, or was it a continent? Was it—could it be—North America?

North America seems a tolerably large place to one who's living inside of it. But it seems no more than a nutshell to one who comes wandering out of the polar regions. Nothing is any longer large except frightful rigors; and one measures distance not in miles but in pain.

We followed the slope of the shoreline for three days, marching fast and making wonderful progress. Then Sylvia caved in, suddenly.

It was such a quick change that I could not believe it at first, but the girl was completely done in.

She had never been used to trekking about. Darrell and I walked, as it were, upon horny hoofs; but her delicate flesh had been pounded and bruised and broken; her feet were bleeding, and purple, and black, and swollen. They looked frightfully bad, when we dressed them, and I had a hideous feeling that they must have been frozen. I thought of Sylvia spending the rest of her life a cripple. But Darrell reassured me.

And Sylvia herself said, as she lay stretched out in her sleeping bag, "I think that this may be the last bad luck. Perhaps we've come so very far south that the goddess no longer follows us with her anger."

She meant what she said, and I was glad. At least it meant that the dread of the goddess was sliding out of her mind, and when the fear was gone, I had an idea that not much love for the old religion of that Smoking Land would remain in her.

At that camp, I had a talk with Darrell.

Sylvia was not going to be in shape to walk for ten days, at least. If she had warned us of her agony in the first place, we could have made very light marches, and drawn her on the sled part of the time, until she was hardened to the trail. As it was, she made a load quite impossible for us over ice that was roughly formed. We

could move forward bit by bit; or we could camp where we had first halted. What I suggested was that we do that, and that I go out and scout.

Plainly, if we had hit an island, it was a big one. We had marched for three days along the shore, and still we had not turned from the northern rim of the land.

My idea was that, perhaps, we might be very close to the Point, after all. If I found it, scouting, then a dog team could be sent out to pick up Sylvia and Darrell and bring them in comfortably.

Darrell agreed; and in half an hour I was on my way. I took Murder with me, loaded him with a small, heavy pack, and my revolver. The rifle I left behind for Darrell and Sylvia.

I had determined that I would make three long marches along the shore until I found nothing; then I would turn and go straight back. I did not like to leave Sylvia for longer than a six-day stretch.

But on the second march, when I was about ready to camp, Murder suddenly disappeared, running ahead, and though I shouted, he would not come back. I remembered my experience with him in the cave in the Smoking Land, and my heart sank.

**H**OWEVER, I went on after him, shouting out, and roaring angrily. And then I saw them. I thought they were

the sheer sparks of my own nager, dancing before my eyes, but now—presently I made out more and more—lights!

I won't say that I was happy. Happiness is too small a term and too light a word. I'll only say that I began to run through the gloom with my hand stretched out—and then the lights spread out to either side, and in a few moments, I knew that I had actually come upon what Darrell, wiser than I, had expected.

When I got to the trader's, I went in the kitchen way. The cook thought I was a tramp, and swore, but I only grinned at him and pushed open the door to the dining room, a little. There was Scanderov sitting as big as life with Leroy and Half-breed Charlie and Chief Gunther.

Outside there was a weird howl. Scanderov started violently. "You know what that sounds like?" he asked.

"It sounds like a lost soul. Maybe it's a were-wolf?" said Chief Gunther.

"It reminds me of that poor cheechako who came up here and got the white dog from the half-breed," said Scanderov.

"I remember him," said Charlie. Being a half-breed himself, his memory for that race was very keen. "I never could make out that man or that dog!" said Charlie. "Pretty far away they came from."

"Well," said Scanderov, "there's one more dead man in the north sea."

"Who?" asked Gunther.



ON THE NEWSSTANDS

## MORNING STAR

By H. Rider Haggard



Bravely she awaited her hour of triumph—or doom. For Neter Tua, deathless daughter of the ages, had staked her throne on a soothsayer's promise of magic aid from beyond the stars against the wrath of Egypt and all its terrible gods!

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"I mean poor Cassidy, of course," said Scanderov. "Out there on a fool's errand, hunting for a friend who had disappeared."

Then I pushed the door wide and stepped in. They looked at me with a good deal of surprise, but finally Scanderov said, without showing the least emotion in his voice, "Why, it's Cassidy. Cassidy, I'm glad to see you back. Where have you been these nine months?"

"I've been north," said I.

"Ah?" says he.

"Yes," said I.

"How far north, please?" And then I thought the thing over.

No, it was too much of a cock-and-bull yarn. Who could believe it? Could I myself have believed it? It was a mirage of the mind, and never could have been—so far away seemed the flaming altar of the goddess, and the dreadful beauty of the Fountain of Life, and the silver-skinned fish who swim so swiftly through the misty air of the Smoking Land.

I saw that I could not tell them anything. "Make it a good one, while you're about it," said Chief Gunther.

Finally I said, "Well, I've been where they weave this cloth. Do you know where that is?" I threw open my parka and showed them the fabric of my coat.

"It's homespun, all right," said Gunther.

But Scanderov leaned over and touched and rubbed the cloth, and then he pulled a thread. He unraveled it and stared at it and at me.

"What's the matter?" asked Gunther.

"It's the wool of the musk-ox—that's all!" said Scanderov.

"Well, and why not?" said Gunther. "They could weave the wool of the musk-ox, all right."

"Who could?" asked Scanderov. "Who is weaving wool, in this part of the world? The Esquimaux?"

Gunther blinked. "Hadn't thought about that," he admitted.

Scanderov was staring at me hard.

I had had a cup of coffee poured out for me, and I was sipping it with immense enjoyment. But I was not hungry. Scanderov said, "Come in here and talk to me."

I got up and went with him into his

own quarters and there he stood, beside a big lamp that gave both heat and light, and he was raveling and unraveling the thread of musk-ox wool between his fingers. "Tell me about it," said he.

"About what?" said I.

"About where you've been," said Scanderov.

I smiled at him. "You wouldn't believe me, Scanderov."

"No?"

"No," said I. "But I've brought back Cleveland Darrell, for one thing."

Scanderov gaped at me.

"You've done what?"

"Darrell—the man I went for," said I.

SCANDEROV lowered himself into a chair, and still kept a grip on the edge of the table as he scowled at the floor. "The Smoking Land?" said he.

"The Smoking Land," I said, to annoy him, "will know about us long before we know much about them. The Smoking Land knows most of the facts about us right now!"

Scanderov shook his head, like an impatient man, troubled by flies. "You won't say any more, eh?" said he.

"No, I won't. I wouldn't be any good," I said. "You couldn't believe me. Nobody could."

"You won't talk," repeated the great explorer, talking mostly for his own ear. "You won't talk—because the yarn is too strange to be believed. Well, if you won't talk, what about Darrell?"

"Darrell is all right," said I, "but he has white hair."

"You're pretty well on the gray side yourself," said he. I laughed at him. "It is, though," said he.

There was a small round mirror hanging on a wall, and I stepped before it. It was true. The beard on my face was a natural enough hue, but my hair was silver gray and that wiglike effect made me appear so old that I hardly recognized my own features.

Suddenly, as I was examining myself, Scanderov called out, "Bah! I see it, now!"

"What do you see?"

"You and Darrell have simply got together in a complicated plot to give him

*(Please continue on page 128)*

# READERS' COLUMN

We are very sorry not to be able to print all of your encouraging letters. But we were glad to find that you are as enthusiastic about our new magazine as we are.

Starting with our next issue we intend to have many more pages where you will find a cross section of ideas and criticisms. We want you to write us. This space will be devoted entirely to you.

In the meantime, here are just a few of the letters that we have already received—but there are many more waiting to be printed.

Thank you for your wonderful response.  
—The Editor

Dear Editor:

Thank you for the valuable service you are performing in bringing to us Abraham Merritt's classics in one magazine. May Merritt's Fantasy live for years and years, till it outshines its three older sisters!

Now that there are four magazines in the Popular chain, I guess it's a little too much to ask for a fifth one, but please try to revive "Astonishing" sometime.

Your first issue was very interesting. Of course, it's impossible to rate the stories because, well, Merritt is Merritt, and no one is going to improve on him. Lawrence's cover was excellent, but you should use old Verne more often on the inside, along with Finlay and Bok—no one else rates mention along with those names. Maybe Bok will do a cover, just for us fans?

Will Fantasy have a letter-column? The fantasy quiz is a good idea, but I don't see where "fantasy" comes in in a question about the amount of hydrogen at the top of a mountain. Though, come to think of it, that question is a good bit of fantasy itself....

I like the idea of the author-profiles. But I believe that AMFM should be reserved for Merritt exclusively, with the others being shifted to F.N. and F.F.M. If there's room after the novel, publish one of Merritt's beautiful poems, a short story if available, or even a piece of non-fiction.

Why don't you print a check-list of all Merritt fantastic works and let the readers decide their preferences? Reprint the ones

which have not been seen around for many years.

Who did the picture on page 119? I don't recognize the style. I guess Finlay's busy with the five other magazines he illustrates, but he'd be around in future issues...Is it at all possible to reprint some of the original illustrations from the Merritt stories? In what magazine was "Creep, Shadow!" originally printed? I think it would be of interest to the readers to know the name of the magazine that published his stories.

There were a few minor errors in getting the magazine together—the cover wasn't centered too well, and a few of the pages were smeared with ink. But I'm sure you'll conquer all these things and soon give us one of the best magazines on the market.

One last thought—how about a photo of Merritt on the Editor's page?

Robert Silverberg  
Brooklyn, New York.

ED: "Creep, Shadow!" first came out in Argosy in 1934. We'll try and get a picture of Merritt for you. The picture on page 119 was by Paul Callé. Thank you for your opinions.

Dear Editor:

Congratulations on turning out a splendid first issue of A. MERRITT'S FANTASY MAGAZINE.

This idea of presenting a dual-story magazine, one devoted to A. Merritt material and the other to that of another author, is a commendable one. It offers all of us the opportunity to read the complete works of this great teller of tales.

Format, type size and style are just about as perfect as one could want. But please don't get into the early habit of "girly" front covers. (This latter comment is solely mine and does not necessarily reflect the wishes of the Association).

Please allow me to take this opportunity to extend to you our best wishes.

Roy W. Loan, Jr., Pres.  
Washington Science-Fiction Assn.

ED: Thanks for the personal suggestion.

# THREE LINES OF OLD FRENCH

By A. Merritt

*Was there no radiant, elusive Lucie—save in his own tortured mind?*

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“BUT rich as was the war for surgical science,” ended Hawtry, “opening up through mutilation and torture unexplored regions which the genius of man was quick to enter, and, entering, found ways to checkmate suffering and death—for always, my friends, the distillate from the blood of sacrifice is progress—great as all this was, the world tragedy has opened up still another region wherein even greater knowledge will be found. It was the clinic unsurpassed for the psychologist even more than for the surgeon.”

Latour, the great little French doctor, drew himself out of the depths of the big chair; the light from the fireplace fell ruddily upon his keen face.

“That is true,” he said. “Yes, that is true. There in the furnace the mind of man opened like a flower beneath a too glowing sun. Beaten about in that colossal tempest of primitive forces, caught in the chaos of energies both physical and psychical—which, although man himself was its creator, made of their maker a moth in a whirlwind—all those obscure, those mysterious factors of mind which men, for lack of knowledge, have named the soul, were stripped of their inhibitions and given power to appear.

“How could it have been otherwise—when men and women, gripped by one shattering sorrow or joy, will manifest the hidden depths of spirit—how could it have been otherwise in that steadily maintained crescendo of emotion?”

McAndrews spoke. “Just which psy-

chological region do you mean, Hawtry?” he asked.

There were four of us in front of the fireplace of the Science Club—Hawtry, who rules the chair of psychology in one of our greatest colleges, and whose name is an honored one throughout the world; Latour, an immortal of France; McAndrews, the famous American surgeon whose work during the war has written a new page in the shining book of science; and myself. These are not the names of the three, but they are as I have described them; and I am pledged to identify them no further.

“I mean the field of suggestion,” replied the psychologist. “The mental reactions which reveal themselves as visions—an accidental formation in the clouds that becomes to the overwrought imaginations of the beholders the so-eagerly-prayed-for hosts of Joan of Arc marching out from heaven; moonlight in the cloud rift that becomes to the besieged a fiery cross held by the hands of archangels; the despair and hope that are transformed into such a legend as the bowmen of Mons, ghostly archers who with their phantom shafts overwhelm the conquering enemy; wisps of cloud over No Man’s Land that are translated by the tired eyes of those who peer out into the shape of the Son of Man himself walking sorrowfully among the dead.

Signs, portents, and miracles; the hosts of premonitions, of apparitions of loved ones—all dwellers in this land of suggestion; all born of the tearing loose of the



As the star-shells flared and died, the soldiers seemed to rock, to try to break from the wire. . . .

veils of the subconscious. Here, when even a thousandth part is gathered, will be work for the psychological analyst for twenty years."

"And the boundaries of this region?" asked McAndrews.

"Boundaries?" Hawtry plainly was perplexed.

McAndrews for a moment was silent. Then he drew from his pocket a yellow slip of paper, a cablegram.

"Young Peter Laveller died today," he said, apparently irrelevantly. "Died where he had set forth to pass—in the remnants of the trenches that cut through the ancient domain of the Seigniors of Tocque-lain, up near Bethune."

"Died there!" Hawtry's astonishment was profound. "But I read that he had been brought home; that, indeed, he was one of your triumphs, McAndrews!"

"I said that he *went* there to die," repeated the surgeon slowly.

So that explained the curious reticence of the Lavellers as to what had become of their soldier son—a secrecy which had puzzled the press for weeks. For young Peter Lavaller was one of the nation's heroes. The only boy of old Peter Laveller—and neither is that the real name of the family—for like the others, I may not reveal it—he was the heir to the grim old coal king's millions, and the secret, best beloved pulse of his heart.

Early in the war he had enlisted with the French. His father's influence might have abrogated the law of the French Army that every man must start from the bottom up—I do not know—but young Peter would have none of it. Steady of purpose, burning with the white fire of the first Crusaders, he took his place in the ranks.

Clean-cut, blue-eyed, standing six feet in his stocking feet, just twenty-five, a bit of a dreamer, perhaps, he was one to strike the imagination of the poilus, and they loved him. Twice he was wounded in the perilous days, and when America came into the war he was transferred to our expeditionary forces. It was at the siege of Mount Kemmel that he received the wounds that brought him back to his father and sister. McAndrews had accompanied him overseas, I knew, and had patched him together—or so all thought.

What had happened then—and why had Laveller gone back to France, to die, as McAndrews put it?

He thrust the cablegram back into his pocket.

"There is a boundary, John," he said to Hawtry. "Laveller's was a borderland case. I'm going to tell it to you." He hesitated. "I ought not to, maybe; and yet I have an idea that Peter would like it told; after all, he believed himself a discoverer." Again he paused, then definitely made up his mind, and turned to me.

"Merritt," you may make use of this if you think it interesting enough. But if you do so decide, then change the names, and be sure to check description short of any possibility of ready identification. After all, it is what happened that is important—if it is important—and those to whom it happened do not matter."

I promised, and I have observed my pledge. I tell the story as he whom I call McAndrews reconstructed it for us there in the shadowed room, while we sat silent until he had entered . . .

**L**AVELLER stood behind the parapet of a first-line trench. It was night—an early April night in northern France—and when that is said, all is said to those who have been there.

Beside him was a trench periscope. His gun lay touching it. The periscope is practically useless at night; so through a slit in the sand-bags he peered out over the three-hundred-foot-wide stretch of No Man's Land.

Opposite him he knew that other eyes lay close to similar slits in the German parapet, watchful as his were for the least movement.

There were grotesque heaps scattered about No Man's Land, and when the star-shells burst and flooded it with their glare these heaps seemed to stir, to move—some to raise themselves, some to gesticulate, to protest. And this was very horrible, for those who moved under the lights were the dead—French and English, Prussian and Bavarian—dregs of a score of carryings to the red wine-press of war set up in this sector.

There were two Jocks on the entanglements; killed Scots, one colandered by

machine-gun hail just as he was breaking through. The shock of the swift, manifold death had hurled his left arm about the neck of the comrade close beside him; and this man had been stricken within the same second. There they leaned, embracing—and as the star-shells flared and died, flared and died, they seemed to rock, to try to break from the wire, to dash forward, to return.

Laveller was weary, weary beyond all understanding. The sector was a bad one and nervous. For almost seventy-two hours he had been without sleep—for the few minutes now and then of dead stupor broken by constant alarms was worse than sleep.

The shelling had been well-nigh continuous, and the food scarce and perilous to get; three miles back through the fire they had been forced to go for it; no nearer than that could the ration dumps be brought.

And constantly the parapets had to be rebuilt and the wires repaired—and when this was done the shells destroyed again, and once more the dreary routine had to be gone through; for the orders were to hold this sector at all costs.

All that was left of Laveller's consciousness was concentrated in his eyes; only his seeing faculty lived. And sight, obeying the rigid, inexorable will commanding every reserve of vitality to concentrate on the duty at hand, was blind to everything except the strip before it that Laveller must watch until relieved. His body was numb; he could not feel the ground with his feet, and sometimes he seemed to be floating in air like—like the two Scots upon the wire!

Why couldn't they be still? What right had men whose blood had drained away into the black stain beneath them to dance and pirouette to the rhythm of the flared? Damn them—why couldn't a shell drop down and bury them?

There was a château half a mile up there to the right—at least it had been a château. Under it were deep cellars into which one could creep and sleep. He knew that, because ages ago, when first he had come into this part of the line, he had slept a night there.

It would be like reentering paradise to crawl again into those cellars, out of the

pitiless rain; sleep once more with a roof over his head.

"I will sleep and sleep and sleep—and sleep and sleep and sleep," he told himself; then stiffened as at the slumber-compelling repetition of the word darkness began to gather before him.

The star-shells flared and died, flared and died; the staccato of a machine gun reached him. He thought that it was his teeth chattering until his groping consciousness made him realize what it really was—some nervous German riddling the interminable movement of the dead.

There was a squidging of feet through the chalky mud. No need to look; they were friends, or they could not have passed the sentries at the angle of the traverse. Nevertheless, involuntarily, his eyes swept toward the sounds, took note of three cloaked figures regarding him.

There were half a dozen of the lights floating overhead now, and by the gleams they cast into the trench he recognized the party.

One of them was that famous surgeon who had come over from the base hospital at Bethune to see made the wounds he healed; the others were his major and his captain—all of them bound for those cellars, no doubt. Well, some had all the luck! Back went his eyes to the slit.

"What's wrong?" It was the voice of his major addressing the visitor.

"What's wrong—what's wrong—what's wrong?" The words repeated themselves swiftly, insistently, within his brain, over and over again, striving to waken it.

Well, what *was* wrong? Nothing was wrong! Wasn't he, Laveller, there and watching? The tormented brain writhed angrily. Nothing was wrong—why didn't they go away and let him watch in peace? He would like it much better.

"Nothing." It was the surgeon—and again the words kept babbling in Laveller's ears, small, whispering, rapidly repeating themselves over and over: "nothing—nothing—nothing—nothing."

But what was this the surgeon was saying? Fragmentarily, only half understood, the phrases registered:

"Perfect case of what I've been telling you. This lad here—utterly worn, weary—all his consciousness centered upon just one thing—watchfulness . . . conscious-

ness worn to finest point . . . behind it all his subconsciousness crowding to escape . . . consciousness will respond to only one stimulus—movement from without . . . but the subconsciousness, so close to the surface, held so lightly in leash . . . what will it do if that little thread is loosed . . . a perfect case."

What were they talking about? Now they were whispering.

"Then, if I have your permission—" It was the surgeon speaking again. Permission for what? Why didn't they go away and not bother him? Wasn't it hard enough just to watch without having to hear? Something passed before his eyes. He looked at it blindly, unrecognizing. His sight must be clouded.

He raised a hand and brushed at his lids. Yes, it must have been his eyes—for it had gone.

A little circle of light glowed against the parapet near his face. It was cast by a small flash. What were they talking about? What were they looking for? A hand appeared in the circle, a hand with long, flexible fingers which held a piece of paper on which there was writing. Did they want him to read, too? Not only watch and hear—but read! He gathered himself together to protest.

Before he could force his stiffened lips to move he felt the upper button of his greatcoat undone, a hand slipped through the opening and thrust something into his tunic pocket just above the heart.

Someone whispered, "Lucie de Tocquelain."

What did it mean? That was not the password.

There was a great singing in his head—as though he were sinking through water. What was that light that dazzled him even through his closed lids? Painfully he opened his eyes.

Laveller looked straight into the disk of a golden sun setting over a row of noble oaks. Blinded, he dropped his gaze. He was standing ankle-deep in soft, green grass, starred with small clumps of blue flowerets. Bees buzzed about in their chalice. Little yellow-winged butterflies hovered over them. A gentle breeze blew, warm and fragrant.

Oddly he felt no sense of strangeness then—this was a normal home world—a

world as it ought to be. But he remembered that he had once been in another world, far, far unlike this one; a place of misery and pain, of blood-stained mud and filth, of cold and wet; a world of cruelty, whose nights were tortured hells of glaring lights and fiery, slaying sounds, and tormented men who sought to rest and sleep and found none, and dead who danced. Where was it? Had there ever really been such a world? He was not sleepy now.

He raised his hands and looked at them. They were grimed and cut and stained. He was wearing a greatcoat, wet, mud-bespattered, filthy. High boots were on his legs. Beside one dirt-incrusted foot lay a cluster of the blue flowerets, half crushed. He groaned in pity, and bent, striving to raise the broken blossoms.

"Too many dead now—too many dead," he whispered; then paused. He *had* come from that nightmare world! How else in this happy, clean one could he be so unclean?

Of course he had—but where was it? How had he made his way from it here? Ah, there had been a password—what had it been?

He had it: "Lucie de Tocquelain!"

Laveller cried it aloud, still kneeling.

A soft little hand touched his cheek. A low, sweet-toned voice caressed his ears.

"I am Lucie de Tocquelain," it said. "And the flowers will grow again—yet it is dear of you to sorrow for them."

**H**E SPRANG to his feet. Beside him stood a girl, a slender maid of eighteen, whose hair was a dusky cloud upon her proud little head and in whose great, brown eyes, resting upon him, tenderness and a half-amused pity dwelt.

Peter stood silent, drinking her in—the low, broad, white forehead; the curved, red lips; the rounded, white shoulders, shining through the silken web of her scarf; the whole lithe, sweet body of her in the clinging, quaintly fashioned gown, with its high, clasping girdle.

She was fair enough; but to Peter's starved eyes she was more than that—she was a spring gushing from the arid desert, the first cool breeze of twilight over a heat-drenched isle, the first glimpse of

paradise to a soul risen from the centuries of hell. And under the burning worship of his eyes her own dropped; a faint rose stained the white throat, crept to her dark hair.

"I—I am the Demoiselle de Tocquelin, *messire*," she murmured. "And you—"

"Laveller—Peter Laveller—is my name, *mademoiselle*," he stammered. "Pardon my rudeness—but how I came here I know not—nor from whence, save that it was—it was a place unlike this. And you—you are beautiful, *mademoiselle*!"

The clear eyes raised themselves for a moment, a touch of roguishness in their depths, then dropped demurely once more—but the blush deepened.

He watched her, all his awakening heart in his eyes; then perplexity awoke, touched him insistently.

"Will you tell me what place this is, *mademoiselle*," he faltered, "and how I came here, if you—" he stopped. From far, far away, from league upon league of space, a vast weariness was sweeping down upon him. He sensed it coming—closer, closer; it touched him; it lapped about him; he was sinking under it; being lost—falling—falling—

Two soft, warm hands gripped his. His tired head dropped upon them. Through the little palms that clasped so tightly pulsed rest and strength. The weariness gathered itself, began to withdraw slowly, so slowly—and was gone!

In its wake followed an ineffable, an uncontrollable desire to weep—to weep in relief that the weariness had passed, that the devil world whose shadows still lingered in his mind was behind him, and that he was here with this maid. And his tears fell, bathing the little hands.

Did he feel her head bend to his, her lips touch his hair? Peace came to him. He rose shamefacedly.

"I do not know why I wept, *mademoiselle*—", he began; and then saw that her white fingers were clasped now in his blackened ones. He released them in sudden panic.

"I am sorry," he stammered. "I ought not touch you—"

She reached out swiftly, took his hands again in hers, patted them half savagely. Her eyes flashed, "I do not see them as

you do, *Messire Pierre*," she answered. "And if I did, are not their stains to me as the stains from hearts of her brave sons on the gonfalons of France? Think no more of your stains save as decorations, *messire*."

France—France? Why, that was the name of the world he had left behind; the world where men sought vainly for sleep, and the dead danced.

The dead danced—what did that mean?

He turned wistful eyes to her.

And with a little cry of pity she clung to him for a moment.

"You are so tired—and you are so hungry," she mourned. "And think no more, nor try to remember, *messire*, till you have eaten and drunk with us and rested for a space."

They had turned. And now Laveller saw not far away a château. It was pinnacled and stately, serene in its gray and lordly with its spires and slender turrets thrust skyward from its crest like plumes flung high from some proud prince's helm. Hand in hand like children the Demoiselle de Tocquelin and Peter Laveller approached it over the greensward.

"It is my home, *messire*," the girl said. "And there among the roses my mother awaits us. My father is away, and he will be sorrowful that he met you not, but you shall meet him when you return."

He was to *return*, then? That meant he was not to stay. But where was he to go—from whence was he to return? His mind groped blindly; cleared again. He was walking among roses; there were roses everywhere, great, fragrant, opened blooms of scarlets and of saffrons, of shell pinks and white; clusters and banks of them, climbing up the terraces, masking the base of the château with perfumed tide.

And as he and the maid, still hand in hand, passed between them, they came to a table dressed with snowy napery and pale porcelains beneath a bower.

A woman sat there. She was a little past the prime of life, Peter thought. Her hair, he saw, was powdered white, her cheeks as pink and white as a child's, her eyes the sparkling brown of those of the *demoiselle*—and gracious—gracious, Peter thought, as some *grande dame* of old France.

The *demoiselle* dropped her a low curtesy.

"*Ma mère*," she said, "I bring you the *Sieur Pierre la Valliere*, a very brave and gallant gentleman who has come to visit us for a while."

The clear eyes of the older woman scanned him, searched him. Then the stately white head bowed, and over the table a delicate hand was stretched toward him.

It was meant for him to kiss, he knew—but he hesitated awkwardly, miserably, looking at his begrimed own.

"The *Sieur Pierre* will not see himself as we do," the girl said in half merry reproof; then she laughed, a caressing, golden chiming. "*Ma mère*, shall he see his hands as we do?"

The white-haired woman, smiled and nodded, her eyes kindly, and, Laveller noted, with that same pity in them as had been in those of the *demoiselle* when first he had turned and beheld her.

The girl touched Peter's eyes lightly, held his palms up before him—they were white and fine and clean and in some unfamiliar way beautiful!

Again the indefinable gaze stifled him, but his breeding told. He conquered the sense of strangeness, bowed from the hips, took the dainty fingers of the stately lady in his, and raised them to his lips.

She struck a silver bell. Through the roses came two tall men in livery, who took from Laveller his greatcoat. They were followed by four small black boys in gay scarlet slashed with gold. They bore silver platters on which were meat and fine white bread and cakes, fruit, and wine in tall crystal flagons!

And Laveller remembered how hungry he was. But of that feast he remembered little—up to a certain point. He knows that he sat there filled with a happiness and content that surpassed the sum of happiness of all his twenty-five years.

The mother spoke little, but the *Demoiselle Lucie* and Peter Laveller chattered and laughed like children—when they were not silent and drinking each other in.

And ever in Laveller's heart an adoration for this maid met so perplexingly grew—grew until it seemed that his heart could not hold his joy. Even the maid's eyes as they rested on his were softer,

more tender, filled with promise; and the proud face beneath the snowy hair became, as it watched them, the essence of that infinitely gentle sweetness that is the soul of the madonnas.

At last the *Demoiselle de Tocquelaine*, glancing up and meeting that gaze, blushed, cast down her long lashes, and hung her head; then raised her eyes bravely.

"Are you content, my mother?" she asked gravely.

"My daughter, I am well content," came the smiling answer.

Swiftly followed the incredible, the terrible—in that scene of beauty and peace it was, said Laveller, like the flashing forth of a gorilla's paw upon a virgin's breast, a wail from deepest hell lancing through the song of angels.

At his right, among the roses, a light began to gleam—a fitful, flaring light that glared and died, glared and died. In it were two shapes. One had an arm clasped about the neck of the other; they leaned embracing in the light, and as it waxed and waned they seemed to pirouette, to try to break from it, to dash forward, to return—to dance!

The dead who danced!

A world where men sought rest and sleep, and could find neither, and where even the dead could find no rest, but must dance to the rhythm of the star-shells!

He groaned; sprang to his feet; watched, quivering in every nerve. Girl and woman followed his rigid gaze; turned to him again with tear-filled, pitiful eyes.

"It is nothing!" said the maid. "It is nothing! See there is nothing there!"

Once more she touched his lids; and the light and the swaying forms were gone. But now Laveller knew. Back into his consciousness rushed the full tide of memory—memory of the mud and filth, the stench, and the fiery, slaying sounds, the cruelty, the misery and the hatreds; memory of torn men and tormented dead; memory of whence he had come, the trenches.

The trenches! He had fallen asleep, and all this was but a dream! He was sleeping at his post, while his comrades were trusting him to watch over them. And those two ghastly shapes among the roses—they were the two Scots on the

wires summoning him back to his duty; beckoning, beckoning him to return. He must waken! He must waken!

Desperately he strove to drive himself from his garden of illusion; to force himself back to that devil world which during this hour of enchantment had been to his mind only as a fog bank on a far horizon. And as he struggled, the brown-eyed maid and the snowy-tressed woman watched—with ineffable pity, tears falling.

"The trenches!" gasped Laveller. "O God, wake me up! I must get back! O God, make me wake!"

"Am I only a dream, then, *ma mie*?"

It was the Demoiselle Lucie's voice—a bit piteous, the golden tones shaken.

"I must get back," he groaned—although at her question his heart seemed to die within him. "Let me wake!"

"Am I a dream?" Now the voice was angry; the demoiselle drew close. "Am I not *real*?"

A little foot stamped furiously on his, a little hand darted out, pinched him viciously close above his elbow. He felt the sting of the pain and rubbed it, gazing at her stupidly.

"Am I a dream, think you?" she murmured, and, raising her palms, set them on his temples, bringing down his head until his eyes looked straight into hers.

Laveller gazed—gazed down, down deep into their depths, lost himself in them. Her warm, sweet breath fanned his cheek; whatever this was, wherever he was—*she* was no dream!

"But I must return—get back to my trench!" The soldier in him clung to the necessity.

"My son—" it was the mother speaking now—"my son, you *are* in your trench."

Laveller gazed at her, bewildered. His eyes swept the lovely scene about him. When he turned to her again it was with the look of a sorely perplexed child. She smiled.

"Have no fear," she said. "Everything is well. You are in your trench—but your trench centuries ago; yes, twice a hundred years ago, counting time as you do—and as once we did."

A chill ran through him. Were they mad? Was he mad? His arm slipped down over a *soft* shoulder; the touch

steadied him, then he was able to go on.

"And you?" he forced himself to ask.

He caught a swift glance between the two, and in answer to some unspoken question the mother nodded. The Demoiselle Lucie pressed soft hands against Peter's face, looked again into his eyes.

"*Ma mie*," she said gently, "we have been—" she hesitated—"what you call—dead—to your world these two hundred years!"

But before she had spoken the words Laveller, I think, had sensed what was coming. And if for a fleeting instant he had felt a touch of ice in every vein, it vanished beneath the exaltation that raced through him, vanished as frost beneath a mist-scattering sun. For if this were true—why, then there was no such thing as death! And it was true!

It was true! He knew it with a shining certainty that had upon it not the shadow of a shadow—but how much his desire to believe entered into this certainty who can tell?

He looked at the *château*. Of course! It was that whose ruins loomed out of the darkness when the flares split the night—in whose cellars he had longed to sleep. Death—oh, the foolish, fearful hearts of men!—this death? This glorious place of peace and beauty?

And this wondrous girl whose brown eyes were the keys of heart's desire! Death—he laughed and laughed again.

ANOTHER thought struck him, swept through him like a torrent. He must get back to the trenches and tell them this great truth he had found. Why, he was like a traveler from a dying world who unwittingly stumbles upon a secret to turn that world dead to hope into a living heaven!

There was no longer need for men to fear the splintering shell, the fire that seared them, the bullets, or the shining steel. What did they matter when this—*this*—was the truth? He must get back and tell them. Even those two Scots would lie still on the wires when he whispered this to them.

But he forgot—they knew now. But they could not return to tell—as he could. He was wild with joy, exultant, lifted up to the skies, a *démigod*—the bearer of a

truth that would free the devil-ridden world from its demons; a new Prometheus who bore back to mankind a more precious flame than had the old.

"I must go!" he cried. "I must tell them! Show me how to return—swiftly!"

A doubt assailed him; he pondered it.

"But they may not believe me," he whispered. "No. I must show them proof. I must carry something back to prove this to them."

The Lady of Tocquelain smiled. She lifted a little knife from the table, and, reaching over to a rose-tree, cut from it a cluster of buds; thrust it toward his eager hand.

Before he could grasp it the maid had taken it.

"Wait!" she murmured. "I will give you another message."

There was a quill and ink upon the table, and Peter wondered how they had come; he had not seen them before—but with so many wonders, what was this small one? There was a slip of paper in the Demoiselle Lucie's hand, too. She bent her little, dusky head and wrote; blew upon the paper, waved it in the air to dry it; sighed, smiled at Peter, and wrapped it about the stem of the rosebud cluster; placed it on the table, and waved back Peter's questing hand.

"Your coat," she said. "You will need it, for now you must go back."

She thrust his arms into the garment. She was laughing—but there were tears in the great, brown eyes; the red mouth was very wistful.

Now the older woman arose, stretched out her hand again; Laveller bent over it, kissed it.

"We shall be here waiting for you, my son," she said softly. "When it is time for you to—come back."

He reached for the roses with the paper wrapped about their stems. The maid darted a hand over his, lifted them before he could touch them.

"You must not read it until you have gone," she said—and again the rose flame burned throat and cheeks.

Hand in hand, like children, they sped over the greensward to where Peter had first met her. They stopped there, regarding each other gravely—and then that other miracle which had happened to

Laveller and that he had forgotten in the shock of his wider realization called for utterance.

"I love you!" whispered Peter Laveller to this living, long-dead Demoiselle de Tocquelain.

She sighed, and was in his arms.

"Oh, I know you do!" she cried. "I know you do, dear one—but I was so afraid you would go without telling me so."

She raised her sweet lips, pressed them long to his; drew back.

"I loved you from the moment I saw you standing here," she told him, "and I will be here waiting for you when you return. And now you must go, dear love of mine; but wait—"

He felt a hand steal into the pocket of his tunic, press something over his heart.

"The messages," she said. "Take them. And remember—I will wait. I promise, I, Lucie de Tocquelain—"

There was a singing in his head. He opened his eyes. He was back in his trench, and in his ears still rang the name of the *demoiselle*, and over his heart he felt still the pressure of her hand. His head was half turned toward three men who were regarding him.

ONE of them had a watch in his hand; it was the surgeon. Why was he looking at his watch. Had he been gone long? he wondered.

Well, what did it matter, when he was the bearer of such a message? His weariness had gone; he was transformed, jubilant; his soul was shouting paeans. Forgetting discipline, he sprang toward the three.

"There is no such thing as death!" he cried. "We must send this message along the lines—at once! At once, do you understand? Tell it to the world—I have proof—"

He stammered and choked in his eagerness. The three glanced at each other. His major lifted his electric flash, clicked it in Peter's face, started oddly—then quietly walked over and stood between the lad and his rifle.

"Just get your breath a moment, my boy, and then tell us about it," he said.

They were devilishly unconcerned, were

they now? Well, wait till they had heard what he *had* to tell them!

And tell them Peter did, leaving out only what had passed between him and the *demoiselle*—for, after all, wasn't that his own personal affair? And gravely and silently they listened to him. But always the trouble deepened in his major's eyes as Laveller poured forth the story.

"And then—I came back, came back as quickly as I could, to help us all; to lift us out of all this—" his hands swept out in a wide gesture of disgust—"for none of it matters! When we die—we live!" he ended.

Upon the face of the man of science rested profound satisfaction.

"A perfect demonstration; better than I could ever have hoped!" he spoke over Laveller's head to the major. "Great, how great is the imagination of man!"

There was a tinge of awe in his voice.

Imagination? Peter was cut to the sensitive, vibrant soul of him:

They didn't believe him! He would show them!

"But I have proof!" he cried.

He threw open his greatcoat, ran his hand into his tunic-pocket; his fingers closed over a bit of paper wrapped around a stem. Ah—now he would show them!

He drew it out, thrust it toward them.

"Look!" His voice was like a triumphant trumpet-call.

What was the matter with them? Could they not see? Why did their eyes search his face instead of realizing what he was offering them? He looked at what he held—then, incredulous, brought it close to his own eyes—gazed and gazed, with a sound in his ears as though the universe were slipping away behind him, with a heart that seemed to have forgotten to beat. For in his hand, stem wrapped in paper, was no fresh and fragrant rosebud cluster his brown-eyed *demoiselle's* mother had clipped for him in the garden.

No—there was but a sprig of artificial buds, worn and torn and stained, faded and old!

A great numbness crept over Peter.

Dumbly he looked at the surgeon, at his captain, at the major whose face was now troubled indeed and somewhat stern.

"What does it mean?" he muttered.

Had it all been a dream? Was there no radiant Lucie—save in his own mind—no brown-eyed maid who loved him and whom he loved?

The scientist stepped forward, took the worn little sprig from the relaxed grip. The bit of paper slipped off, remained in Peter's fingers.

"You certainly deserve to know just what you've been through, my boy," the urbane, capable voice beat upon his dulled hearing, "after such a reaction as you have provided to our little experiment." He laughed pleasantly.

Experiment? Experiment? A dull rage began to grow in Peter—vicious, slowly rising.

"*Messieur!*" called the major appealingly, somewhat warningly, it seemed, to his distinguished visitor.

"Oh, by your leave, major," went on the great man, "here is a lad of high intelligence—of education, you could know that by the way he expressed himself—he will understand."

The major was not a scientist—he was a Frenchman, human, and with an imagination of his own. He shrugged; but he moved a little closer to the resting rifle.

"We had been discussing, your officers and I," the capable voice went on, "dreams that are the half-awakened mind's effort to explain some touch, some unfamiliar sound, or whatnot that has aroused it from its sleep. One is slumbering, say, and a window nearby is broken. The sleeper hears, the consciousness endeavors to learn—but it has given over its control to the subconscious. And this rises accommodatingly to its mate's assistance. But it is irresponsible, and it can express itself only in pictures.

**IT** TAKES the sound, and—well weaves a little romance around it. It does its best to explain—alas! Its best is only a more or less fantastic lie—recognized as such by the consciousness the moment it becomes awake.

"And the movement of the subconsciousness in this picture production is inconceivably rapid. It can depict in the fraction of a second a series of incidents that if actually lived would take hours—yes, days—of time. You follow me, do you now? Perhaps you recognize the ex-

perience I outline? You certainly should."

Laveller nodded. The bitter, consuming rage was mounting within him steadily. But he was outwardly calm, all alert. He would hear what this self-satisfied devil had done to him, and then—

"Your officers disagreed with some of my conclusions. I saw you here, weary, concentrated upon the duty at hand, half in hypnosis from the strain and the steady flaring and dying of the lights. You offered a perfect clinical subject, a laboratory test unexcelled—"

Could he keep his hands from his throat until he had finished? Laveller wondered. Lucie, his Lucie, a fantastic lie—

"Steady, *mon vieux*—" it was his major whispering. Ah, when he struck, he must do it quickly, his officer was too close, too close. Still—he must keep his watch for him through the slit. He would be peering there perhaps, when he, Peter, leaped.

"And so—" the surgeon's tones were in his best student-clinic manner—"and so I took a little sprig of artificial flowers that I had found pressed between the leaves of an old missal I had picked up in the ruins of the château yonder. On a slip of paper I wrote a line of French—for then I thought you a French soldier. It was a simple line from the ballad of Aucassin and Nicolette—

*And there she waits to greet him  
when all his days are run.*

"Also, there was a name written on the title-page of the missal, the name, no doubt, of its long-dead owner—'Lucie de Tocquelain'—"

Lucie! Peter's rage and hatred were beaten back by a great surge of longing—rushed back stronger than ever.

"So I passed the sprig of flowers before your unseeing eyes; consciously unseeing, I mean, for it was certain your subconsciousness would take note of them. I showed you the line of writing—your subconsciousness absorbed this, too, with its suggestion of a love troth, a separation, an awaiting. I wrapped it about the stem of the sprig, I thrust them both into your pocket, and called the name of Lucie de Tocquelain into your ear.

"The problem was what your other self

would make of those four things—the ancient cluster, the suggestion in the line of writing, the touch, and the name—a fascinating problem, indeed!

"And hardly had I withdrawn my hand, almost before my lips closed on the word I had whispered—you had turned to us shouting that there was no such thing as death, and pouring out, like one inspired, that remarkable story of yours—all, all built by your imagination from—"

But he got no further. The searing rage in Laveller had burst all bounds, had flared forth murderously, had hurled him silently at the surgeon's throat. There were flashes of flame before his eyes—red, sparkling sheets of flame. He would die for it, but he would kill this cold-blooded fiend who could take a man out of hell, open up to him heaven, and then thrust him back into hell grown now a hundred times more cruel, with all hope dead in him for eternity.

Before he could strike, strong hands gripped him, held him back. The scarlet curtain flared before his eyes, faded away. He thought he heard a tender, golden voice whispering to him:

"It is nothing! It is nothing! See as I do!"

He was standing between his officers, who held him fast on each side. They were silent, looking at the now white-faced surgeon with more than somewhat of cold, unfriendly sternness in their eyes.

**M**Y BOY, my boy—" that scientist's poise was gone; his voice trembling, agitated. "I did not understand—I am sorry—I never thought you would take it so seriously."

Laveller spoke to his officers—quietly. "It is over, sirs. You need not hold me."

They looked at him, released him, patted him on the shoulder, fixed again their visitor with that same cold scrutiny.

Laveller turned stumblingly to the parapet. His eyes were full of tears. Brain and heart and soul were nothing but a blind desolation, a waste utterly barren of hope or of even the ghost of the wish to hope. That message of his, the sacred truth that was to set the feet of a tormented world on the path of paradise—a dream.

His Lucie, his brown-eyed *demoiselle*

who had murmured her love for him—a thing compounded of a word, a touch, a writing, and an artificial flower!

He could not, would not believe it. Why, he could still feel the touch of her soft lips on his, her warm body quivering in his arms. And she had said he would come back—and promised to wait for him.

What was that in his hand? It was the paper that had wrapped the rosebuds—the cursed paper with which that cold devil had experimented with him.

Laveller crumpled it savagely—raised it to hurl it at his feet.

Someone seemed to stay his hand.

Slowly he opened it.

The three men watching him saw a glory steal over his face, a radiance like that of a soul redeemed from endless torture. All its sorrow, its agony, was wiped out, leaving it a boy's once more.

He stood, wide-eyed, dreaming.

The major stepped forward, gently drew the paper from Laveller.

There were many star-shells floating on high now, the trench was filled with their glare, and in their light he scanned the fragment.

On his face when he raised it there was a great awe—and as they took it from him and read this same awe dropped down upon the others like a veil.

For over the line the surgeon had written were now three other lines—in old French—

*Nor grieve, dear heart, nor fear the  
seeming—*

*Here is waking after dreaming.*

*She who loves you, Lucie*

\* \* \*

That was McAndrews's story, and it was Hawtry who finally broke the silence that followed his telling of it.

"The lines had been on the paper, of course," he said; "they were probably faint, and your surgeon had not noticed them. It was drizzling, and the dampness brought them out."

"No," answered McAndrews; "they had not been there."

"But how can you be so sure?" remonstrated the psychologist.

"Because I was the surgeon," said McAndrews quietly. "The paper was a page torn from my notebook. When I wrapped it about the sprig it was blank—except for the line I myself had written there.

"But there was one more bit of—well, shall we call it evidence, John? The handwriting in Laveller's message was the same as that found in the missive enclosing the flowers. And the signature 'Lucie' was that same signature, curve for curve and quaint, old-fashioned angle for angle."

A longer silence fell, broken once more by Hawtry, abruptly.

"What became of the paper?" he asked. "Was the ink analyzed? Didn't you even attempt to—"

"As we stood there wondering," interrupted McAndrews, "a squall swept down upon the trench. It tore the paper from my hand—carried it away. Laveller watched it go; he made no effort to go after it."

"It does not matter. I know now," he said—and smiled at me, the forgiving, happy smile of a joyous boy. "I apologize to you, doctor. You're the best friend I ever had. I thought at first you had done to me what no other man would do to another—I see now that you have done for me what no other man could."

"And that is all. He went through the war neither seeking death nor avoiding it. I loved him like a son. He would have died after that Mount Kemmel affair had it not been for me. He wanted to live long enough to bid his father and sister goodbye, and I—patched him up. He did it, and then set forth for the trench beneath the shadow of the ruined old château where his brown-eyed demoiselle had found him."

"Why?" asked Hawtry.

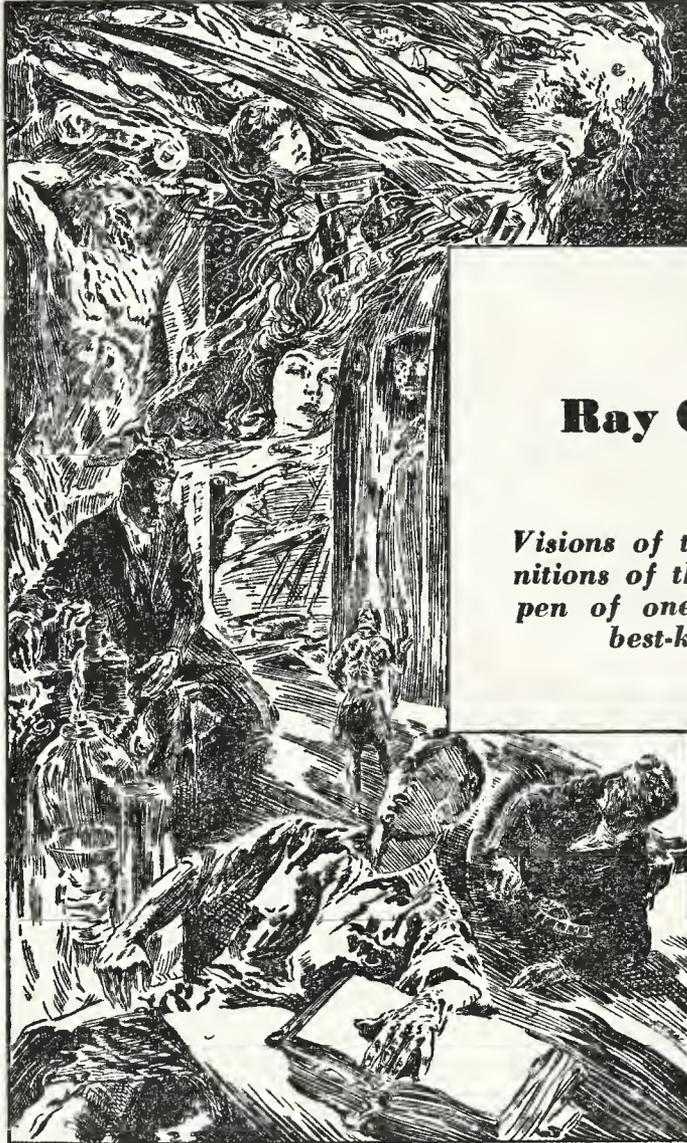
"Because he thought that from there he could—go back—to her more quickly."

"To me an absolutely unwarranted conclusion," said the psychologist, wholly irritated, half angry. "There is some simple, natural explanation of it all."

"Of course, John," answered McAndrews soothingly—"of course there is. Tell us it, can't you."

But Hawtry, it seemed, could not offer any particulars.

# THE SCIENCE OF TIME-TRAVEL



By  
**Ray Cummings**

*Visions of the past . . . premonitions of the future—from the pen of one of science-fiction's best-known writers.*



**A**S MOST of my readers know, I have in the past written many stories with time-travel as their theme. It is a subject which has always

interested me tremendously. To me there is romance in it, perhaps more than in any other basic idea used in scientific fiction. It has always fascinated me to

imagine the almost infinite number and variety of events which have occurred in the little space which I am at the moment occupying; and what will happen here, at other moments still to come. A million happenings in this crowded space, with only "time" to keep them separate!

Looking back over time-travel stories which I have written, I recall that often I advanced scientific explanations of how my very scientific hero accomplished his time-travelling. All these theories to the best of my knowledge were original with me. And now I have been asked to gather them into one connected exposition.

The science of time-travel! Not an easy subject, even for an imaginative writer! The human mind really encompasses new ideas of matter and space, but somehow, it balks at time. I think Albert Einstein made some remarks about that—something to the effect that nature has so placed us, so endowed us if you will, that our whole conception of time is of necessity false.

The laws of matter and space and time certainly are imperfectly understood. The truth about the material universe certainly is very different from what our five senses tell us of it. But our minds may go beyond that. So I would have you conceive that the basis is energy.

This "energy" may with equal validity be called by another name—"change." The static does not exist insofar as we have been able to discover. The Universe changes; no smallest particle of it is the same from one instant to the next. The living cell expands, divides to reproduce itself, runs its course, dies and decays. But it is not lost, merely it changes—turns to other forms, liquid and gas. Its existence goes on, reconverted. Rocks once were gas, then liquid, then solid. Eroded by water and wind they break powder, wash away, blow away. But still they exist returning again in other forms of other things.

All nothing but change—nothing but energy. The atoms, the very electrons, protons, neutrons, of all matter in the material universe are building up or breaking down. Never are they inert. Changing always—nothing but manifestations of energy.

And matter itself? Agitated molecules, atoms and all those other infinitely tiny

things to which we have given names—in their essence they are nothing but energy! There is no mass of actuality as our senses seem to perceive it. Nothing is solid. Already physicists have discovered that when we probe to the very ultimate smallest particle of matter, it proves to be nothing but a vortex, a whirlpool. Of what? Of nothingness! Or if you like, a whirlpool of what we are pleased to call electrical energy. Of such unsubstantial stuff our universe is built! And our senses trick us to call it solid. A whirling blade tricks our sight—it looks like a solid disc if it whirls fast enough. A stream of water coming out of a pipe tricks our sense of touch into thinking it is solid, as solid as a bar of steel—if that water moves fast enough. All nothing but movement. Nothing but energy!

SO MUCH for matter, as we conceive it to exist in space. I would have you conceive now what I might call the physical aspect of time. Think of it, for instance, as an all-pervading etheric fluid filling what we call "space." Picture it strewn in a line, from the Beginning to the End. By the limitations of the human mind, instinctively we conceive everything in terms of tangibility. So, to make it easier for us, we picture time now as a fluid, shaped so that it could lie in some monstrous pipe, perfectly straight, of inconceivable length. The Beginning and the End bound it. This time-fluid I conceive to be at rest—the one thing of all things which does not move nor change.

Imagine then, that the time-fluid is progressively of different physical character along all its length from the Beginning to the End. A different pressure, or vibratory rate; or temperature. Anything you like. Let us say hot at the Beginning, cold at the End—with every gradation in between. Into this, at the Beginning, the catalyst—the Divine Thought if you like—is plunged. It is hot, to match the time-fluid. Because of that, let us say, it can remain there. But it cannot spread as it is, for time, there at the Beginning, will not tolerate anything cooler. It will not permit any change at all. Nothing can happen at any single point in time. And so the catalyst cools infinitesimally

*(Please continue on page 129)*

## By Victor Rousseau

**T**HEY tell you on Grand Miquelon that the seals have power of magic over the hearts of fishermen, for these seal people were once men and women before they sinned. And if a seal woman can win a mortal's love she gains a soul also.

Therefore, fishermen in the sealing season—that is to say, in late March and early April—when the seals love to lie basking upon the broken ice-floes off the Newfoundland shore, kill the mother first and her young later.

If they should first kill the immature

ing, and already the mid-April sun was melting the floes. Red-handed, with throats bared and dripping brows, the fishermen were hacking their way among the herds.

The mother followed her dead cub, moaning, but always just out of Pierre's reach.

Twice he turned on her, but neither time could he achieve his purpose, for the appeal in the mother seal's brown eyes pierced him to the heart. They were like a woman's eyes.

Pierre superstitiously recalled the an-



# THE SEAL MAIDEN

*Had mortal love endowed her with a soul,  
as legend had foretold? And must she now  
live forever tormented by that poignancy  
of grief that only the indestructible can  
know?*

seal they must not look into the mother's eyes, but club with face averted.

But Pierre Drouin looked after he had killed the cub, and spared the mother.

Jean Faguy, who shared his boat, said that he seemed like a man dazed, for he dropped his club, turned, and made his way slowly back over the unstable, rocking floes toward his boat, the *Marthe Ros*, which he had named after his young wife while he was courting her, dragging the dead cub behind him.

Jean remembered this afterward; but he had no time to wonder, for one month is all that Newfoundland law allows for seal-

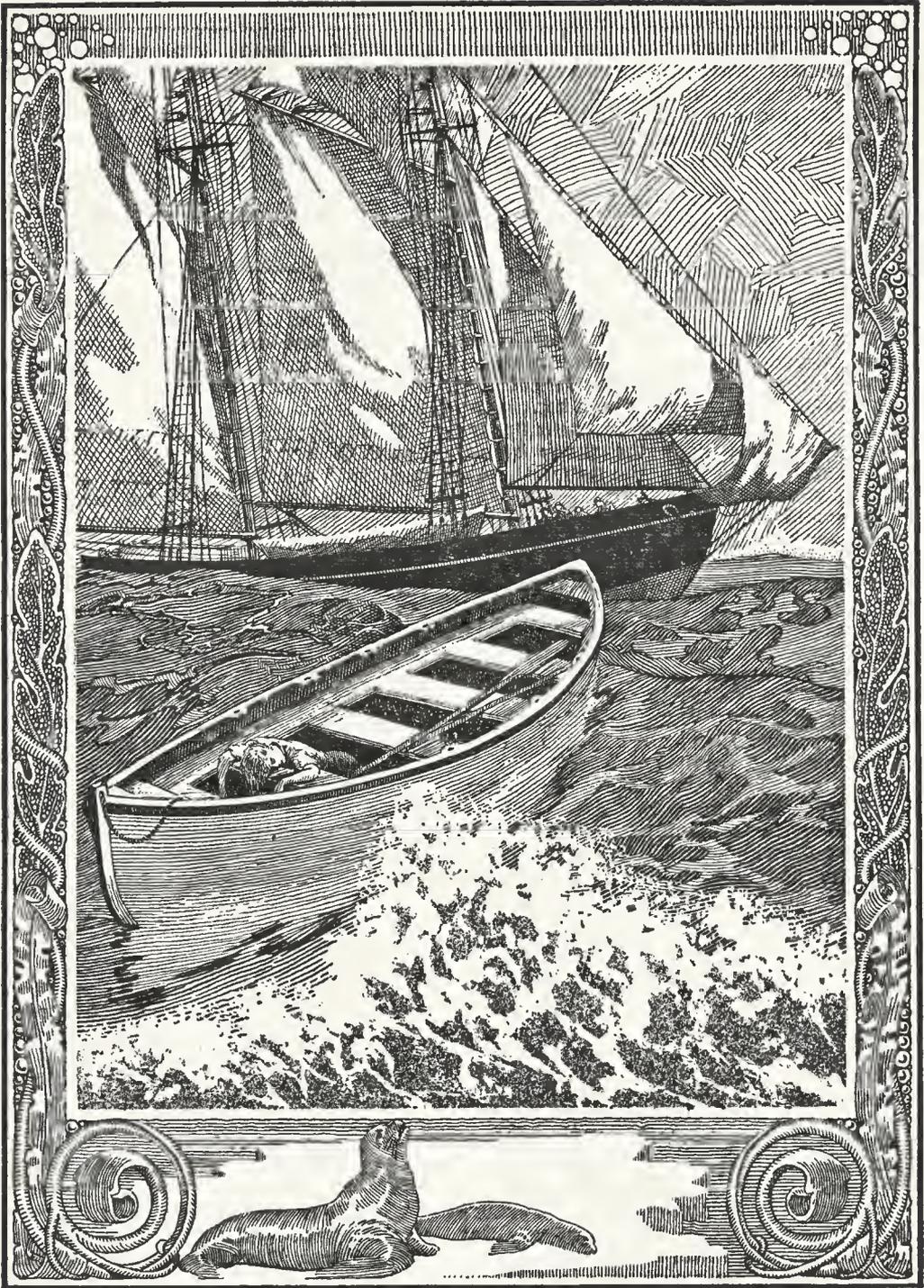
cient legend of the Miquelon fishermen.

He knew that he had looked into a soul obscured but conscious, and that this seal soul, measuring itself beside the human one, knew itself equal in love, though it fell short in understanding.

Jean Faguy, returning toward the *Marthe Ros*, saw the mother seal at the water's edge, watching the boat and whimpering.

"*Hola, Pierre!*" he shouted. "There is thy seal!"

Then he saw the dead cub and the look upon Pierre's face, and understood what had happened.



A woman! And no such woman was ever seen on Grand Miquelon before!

Crossing himself fearfully, he went into the cabin and prayed that Ste. Anne would send no storm to punish them.

When the long twilight was shading into night they weighed anchor and started homeward, and all night Pierre sat like a man in a daze.

Next morning the gray sea reflected a gray sky. The vessel was headed straight toward Miquelon. The bleak Newfoundland shore had faded into the fogs. The warm image of Marthe stole into Pierre's heart.

They had been married only twelve days when he went out with the fleet. In twelve hours more he would be home. His cottage, set into the flank of a hill, faced the ocean; in his mind's eye he saw the nets drying upon the stakes along the sandy beach, and Marthe, seated in the yellow lamp-light, spinning at her wheel.

He would ascend the little hill and she would see him and rush into his arms, and all the winter months they would be together. Pierre went on deck to relieve Jean.

Then, not a cable's length from the boat, he thought he saw—a brown head upon the tossing waves!

He shouted to Jean, but Jean could see nothing, and when Pierre looked again the head was gone. It was not until long afterward that Jean recalled this incident.

Now hear Jean's story to Père Legouffre.

"It was about noon, *monsieur*, and the gale had been freshening until we thought we would have to run for St. Pierre. All at once we sighted a ship's boat on the sea and drove toward her into the wind's jaws, thinking her some derelict. But when we drew alongside we saw a woman within.

"A woman! No such woman was ever seen on Grand Miquelon before. Her skin was brown as a bird and her lips redder than boxberries. Her eyes were closed, and when she opened them they fell upon Pierre's, and they were brown, like a seal's eyes, *monsieur*. I crossed myself, and when I looked at Pierre I crossed myself again, for he was staring at her like a man bewitched.

"I said that the weather was wild, yet now not a breeze stirred and for a cable's length all around us the ocean was flat and oily, and outside this was a barrier of foam. The sun scorched us out of the sky, and the air was aglow like burnished copper. It was devil's weather.

"We took her into the *Marthe Ros*. When she spoke it sounded like the singing I once heard at Quebec, in the Basilica, and,

though her words were neither French nor English, Pierre seemed to understand her."

But afterward the men in the other boats that were scattered upon the sea said that they had seen the *Marthe Ros* heave to in wildest weather and careen, bow under, from wave to wave. But of the derelict they had seen nothing.

SO the *Marthe Ros* drove into harbor, first of the fleet, and on the quay the island women had gathered to greet their men. Marthe ran to her husband, but when she saw the castaway who clung to him she stopped and looked at him in perplexity.

Then, since he did not speak to her, she began to weep. She was tender-hearted and timid and easily abashed.

She took him by the hand and he made no sign of recognition, but walked at her side, like one in a dream, and the strange woman went with them. The island women, who had been watching her, began to whisper and point and hoot at her.

Half an hour later Père Legouffre, who had been told of these happenings, entered Pierre's cottage. He found him seated before the fire, staring in front of him. The strange woman crouched beside the blaze and Marthe wept at the door.

The curé took Pierre by the arm.

"My son," he said, "who is this woman whom you have brought into your house? I must make inquiries about her, and meanwhile she shall inhabit the cottage of Guillaume Robitaille, who was drowned."

He led the woman away.

Next morning Père Legouffre heard the sound of sobbing outside his door. He left his bed reluctantly, for it was cold weather, and peered through the window.

Upon the step crouched Marthe Drouin; she had lain there since dawn. She was soaked with the rain.

"Father," she said, "come to Guillaume Robitaille's cottage with baptismal water."

Inside the cottage Père Legouffre found the strange woman lying upon the bed, and by her side a new-born child, a girl. Pierre sat in Guillaume Robitaille's chair.

Though it was so early, half the island women were gathered before the door, reviling her. One, Louise Racabout, flung a stone inside the house.

Next day the last boats of the fleet came in, but Jules Racabout had been swept into the waves, five sea miles outside the harbor.

Some remembered that his father had

died thus and said that he had been fore-destined, but most thought that it was the spell of the sea witch.

That same night, too, Achille Racabout fell from the cottage roof. It was a little fall, but the boy went limping all his life because of it.

The good curé was skeptical of the fisherwives' tales; but he knew that evil ever stalks abroad, and there is no place so remote but the father of lies is there.

He baptized the child, and before nightfall the strange woman had passed out of Miquelon and all conscious life as placidly as she had drifted in.

A little before she died she motioned to the curé to take from her throat a locket upon a chain and place it about the child's.

Inside it was the miniature of a young man, handsome and distinguished looking. This done, she closed her eyes peacefully. No news was ever learned concerning her.

The babe was taken into Pierre Drouin's family. Pierre died that winter suddenly, about the time when the seals gather upon the pairing grounds.

Marthe tended the little Marie as her own child, for she had none by Pierre, but she could not love her—she could not forget the glamour that her mother had cast over her husband.

Still, she cared for her during the first ten years of Marie's life, and then she joined her husband.

At ten, Marie Drouin, as she was called, was taken into service by old Mère Faguy, the mother of Jean, Pierre's partner, now a middle-aged man. Jean had never married.

Some said that Marthe Drouin had been his sweetheart before she married Pierre; it was certain that Jean had seemed to care for no woman since her marriage.

But as Marie increased in years, and the dark beauty of her mother began to show in her, Jean often took the child's part against the harsh old Mère Faguy.

She hated and feared Marie and worked her as no Christian should have done; still, all knew that Marie had no soul, despite the curé's arguments, for was she not the offspring of seals?

The women whispered this and pulled their children out of the way when Marie passed. Her manner, too, did not win pity for her.

She was wild and sullen, quite unlike the other children of Miquelon, and at an age when the island girls would have been beginning to dream of their future hus-

bands she would be met wandering along the shore alone or romping into the sea to swim.

None dream of swimming, even in July, in those icy waters, but she would plunge boldly into the breakers and emerge, shaking the spray from her glistening skin.

Folks said it was heathenish and a sign of her seal origin, but Père Legouffre had confirmed her and knew that her soul was whiter than many in his flock.

Still, he would sigh when he thought of her homeless lot upon Miquelon, and think of some possible husband for her.

AS she grew older she became more stubborn and rebellious.

Once, when the old woman beat her, she would not cry, and Mère Faguy, goaded by her contempt, tried to snatch the locket from her neck. Then Marie turned on Mère Faguy so fiercely that the old woman shrank back in terror.

"Take care!" she sneered. "Give back that devil's charm of thine to the sea or thou wilt never gain a lover—or a soul, either—in spite of the curé."

It was the ancient superstition of sacrifice to the ocean, current upon Miquelon, as in many seafaring regions of the world.

After that incident Mère Faguy never laid hand on Marie again. She drove her less hard. She was growing old and her passions and interests were slipping away.

Marie began to assume charge of the cottage, while the old woman sat in her chair and dozed.

As for Jean, since that scene in the cottage a light had come into his eyes whenever he looked at the girl. Old Mère Faguy noticed it.

"Take care, Jean," she croaked, after his eyes had followed Marie to the door. "She will not make a wife for thee, my son. She will have thy soul, as her mother had that of Pierre Frouin."

Jean Faguy, forty-four and prematurely old, bowed his head on his hands.

He had never loved but once, but now his passion for Marie, with her slim body and thin face, her flashing eyes and sullen mouth, was overpowering.

He had tried to control it. He had always been self-controlled. But his madness was intolerable.

He began to drink. His mother was in her dotage now; when she was dead the girl should be his; till then he must guard himself.

But this madness mastered him one

evening when he came home from the tavern.

He scorned his hesitation as he strode up the hill, thinking of the friendless girl and the old woman who nodded over the fire, now half a voice and half a memory, and always back fifty years before with her first husband, whom she had loved.

Marie had set the table and Jean stirred toward her. She stood still, looking at him insolently, resting like a crane on one long leg.

Of a sudden Jean threw his arms about her and pressed her to him.

The next moment her fist caught him between the eyes and felled him to the floor. Marie laughed derisively as she fled up the stairs.

No more was said. Mère Faguy had a spell of clear-mindedness and resumed charge of the cottage for a few weeks. Jean watched the girl closely.

He noticed that she was abroad late, and that she would start up at the distant sound of lame Achille's fiddle, which cried up and down the cliffs till late at night.

Achille had never succeeded in life. He did not even own a boat. He was a dreamer, who dreamed music upon the hills and told it to his violin.

Upon the mainland he would have become one of those wandering fiddlers who travel from farm to farm, always welcomed and always dependent on others' bounty. On the little island there was no scope for such a life.

Sometimes he went out on the boat of Charles Robitaille, who pitied him, but his lameness hindered him and his share of the catch was pitifully small. But Achille, fiddling upon the hills, was happy. Here he had met Marie, sprawling recklessly on the edge of an abyss and staring into the sun.

"Play that again," she said—it was the first time she had noticed him.

Achille played, and better than he had ever played before.

"I like that," she said. "What is it meant to be?"

"That," stammered Achille, "is a piece I have composed."

"When you played it," said the girl, "I seemed to hear the gale howling across the broken ice-floes on which the seals lie, raising their heads to call their mates, when no boat is near.

She wriggled to where the boy had flung himself down on the grass. Shy, hesitating, she pulled the chain from her neck and showed Achille the miniature in-

side of the locket. He bent closer to look.

"That is my father," she said. "He is a great man in his own country—a deputy, or even a governor, like M. Floquet. Some day I shall take a boat and cross the sea to find him. He will be so glad to see me, and he will give me beautiful clothes and servants, and we shall travel all over the world together. Do you not want to travel, Achille, to see the ocean and strange countries?"

"No," answered the fiddler slowly. "I like Miquelon."

"Do you not want to travel with me, Achille?" she asked.

The boy looked at her.

"Yes, with thee, Marie," he answered, and both were silent with a new-born shame.

Marie was then sixteen, and Achille five years older.

Jean Faguy was not the only person who had made plans for the girl's future. Père Legouffre had been thinking hard also. He talked with Jean, and what Jean told him heartened him wonderfully.

He sought the girl and found her seated upon the shore listening to the throbbing of a fiddle upon the cliff.

"My child," said the old priest, "thou knowest that Mère Faguy will not live through the winter, and thou canst not keep house for an unmarried man. Jean loves thee, he will provide for thee. Wilt thou marry him?"

Marie shrugged her shoulders.

"If you wish it, father," she answered.

Père Legouffre was overjoyed.

He led her to Jean, who sat crosslegged before the cottage mending his nets. The sealing season was at hand, and besides seals there should be heavy catches of fish. He placed the girl's hand in Jean's.

"She will marry thee, Jean," said the curé.

Jean Faguy rose slowly, the color flecking his pale cheeks with spots of red. He could not believe it true. Marie's hand lay in his. He bent and kissed the girl's cheek.

Marie made a little wry mouth, and then in imagination she was roving the hills again, listening to Achille's fiddle.

AS TO the current matter, she only looked on it as a new servitude, to be accepted till she was ready to sail. She would keep house for Jean instead of for Mère Faguy. Jean watched her stride away over the sands.

"Thou must have patience, Jean," said Père Legouffre. "She is a child still. Wait

till thy boat returns from Newfoundland. Thy absence will count for much."

Jean wept over his fishing nets.

Achille met Marie upon the hills next day, but his fiddle was silent.

"What is this they say, that thou art pledged to Jean?" he asked.

"Let them say," Marie answered. "When we are ready we will leave Miquelon together, thou and I."

"I love thee, Marie!" cried the boy, and strained his arms about her and kissed her lips.

The girl looked at him in terror.

Suddenly everything was changed for her. Her soul leaped up as something that has overslept. The sun was dancing on the snow, the pines were singing; surrounded her, it was everywhere, and she had never known it before.

"I love thee, Achille!" she cried, and flung her arms about him. For a long minute they forgot all but each other.

Out of the pines crept Jean Faguy. He was biting his bloodless lips and his hands were clenched. The lovers felt his malign presence blot out their sun.

As Achille turned, Jean hurled himself upon him with a scream, and felled him, and as the lame boy tried to rise he began beating him mercilessly. Suddenly the girl's hand shot forth.

The knife which she had ripped from her bosom dented the buckle of the belt Jean wore and the point gashed his skin. He released Achille and staggered away. Marie bent over the lame boy, sobbing, and bathed his face with snow.

Achille went back to his cabin upon the hills. He hung his fiddle upon the wall; he could not play that night. It seemed to him that he would never play again.

The vague desires and the long thoughts of youth, the restlessness which it had assuaged, the dreams it had made real had grouped themselves round the figure of his beloved.

He hated Miquelon now. He wanted her—her presence, her arms round him, her soft mouth, her love, her pity, that sense of two that made either invulnerable. He shivered in the unlit room. She would never come back to him.

Since childhood he had learned that he could only possess what others refused. He had Marie's love but Jean wanted her. His fiddle hung mute on the wall and he had only his dreams now.

A shadow crept across the little window-pane. The door creaked in the night

wind. Achille started, and his heart leaped and thumped tumultuously, for he thought that some one had tapped.

He crossed the floor, stopped trembling, and dared not open.

A hand was laid against the door. A whisper outside, not of the pines, and Achille flung the door open. A gust of icy wind rushed in. Marie stood there. Then the air grew insufferably hot.

She stepped across the threshold and closed the door behind her. Achille dared not move; he was afraid that he would die.

"Dost thou still love me?" she murmured, and led him back to his seat, knelt down, and placed her arms around him, her cheek resting against his.

"They wanted to arrest me," she said, laughing. "I went back, but I saw shadows of men against the firelight. I listened at the door. Jean was talking of sending me to the prison at St. Pierre. So I came back to thee."

Achille sat motionless and she kneeled there at his side contented.

The little, bare cabin had become a palace; the boy, disfigured, bruised, lame, helpless, and the girl stared at each other in wonder and ecstasy. Each was transformed in the other's eyes.

These outcasts, rejected by all their world, had become greater than the world in their love for each other. Their innocence was stronger than their love, and mightier.

They sat together at the cabin door, feeling neither the cold nor the fierce winter wind, and gazed over the sea.

"I shall build thee a boat," he said, interpreting her thoughts.

"Thou dost not fear me as the rest do, Achille?" she asked.

"I love thee," answered Achille, and they kissed and crouched together in the darkness, their arms round each other.

Suddenly the woods were filled with sound.

Men sprang out from the pines, seized them, tore them apart. They flung the boy inside the hut and locked the door, and carried the girl down to the house of Jean Faguy.

She did not struggle, for with her love the fierceness of her nature seemed to have departed. And take her where they chose, she cared not, while the world held Achille.

IN HER accustomed corner the old mother nodded over her folded hands, dozing her life away. Around the table sat Jean



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Faguy, Père Legouffre, and M. Floquet, the governor of the islands.

M. Floquet turned and gazed at Marie with frank interest as she stood defiantly before him.

"So this is the girl who tried to murder you this afternoon, you say, M. Faguy?" he said. His voice was ironical.

Jean burst out with an impassioned tale of his wrongs. She had betrothed herself to him yesterday; that afternoon he had found her in the woods with another man and she had tried to murder him. He wished her sent to the prison at St. Pierre. At any rate he declined to harbor her longer unless—unless—

Faguy was silent.

If Jean had hoped to awaken sympathy for himself he had miscalculated.

M. Floquet, the new governor, had been sent out from France but five months previously, and his views were those of his beloved city of light.

He thought Jean's plaint ridiculous and unmanly, and him lucky to have escaped with only a body scratch. When Jean broke down he looked at Marie with more interest than before.

"It is evident, *mademoiselle*, that this betrothal was not wholly agreeable to you," he said.

"I have always hated him; the beast," said Marie. "Yesterday he kissed my cheek."

"And what is this locket they tell me of?" inquired the governor sternly, to hide his laughter. "Will you not show it to me?"

The girl saw his amusement, but she saw no unkindness in his face.

She took the chain from her throat and handed the locket to the governor. He studied the miniature intently.

"It must be—it must be," he muttered to Père Legouffre. "When was her mother cast away?"

"In April of 1894, your excellency," answered the curé. "Will you permit his excellency to keep your locket a while?" he asked the girl.

"No, *monsieur*," answered the girl, and took the chain from the governor's outstretched hand.

He smiled and turned to the curé.

"You accept her guardianship, then, for the present?" he asked.

He spoke to Marie.

"Will you keep house for *monsieur* the curé if I dismiss this charge, *mademoiselle*?" he asked.



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the voyagers before they weighed anchor. Through tear-dimmed eyes she saw Charles Robitaille and Achille hoist the brown, sea-washed sail. The canvas fluttered in the wind, the keel stirred in the blue water. Then Achille was at her side.

"Till May," he said as he folded her in his arms. "Thou art mine always, Marie?" "Always," she answered, and at the word her heart fluttered with joy.

The boats departed, lining the snow-strewn shores, grew smaller, veering into the haze like careening gulls. Marie walked home beside the curé. She was brave now and happy; it was so short a time till May.

April came in with sleet and went out with sunshine. The snows melted, flowers peered out from the crannies of the cliffs.

Marie's happiness was supreme. She sang all day. Père Legouffre was like a father to her and hardly suffered her to work at all.

As for Jean Faguy, she never saw him. He had not gone out with the fleet, but sat at home, tending his mother. He had become the shadow of a man and very old.

Life, which had twice denied itself to him, had dropped its mask and showed the death behind its lure.

**T**OWARD the end of April the first of the boats returned, laden with skins and fish. The catch had been unusually good, and Achille's boat was already heavily freighted, said the report.

Then, day by day, other boats came drifting in. Each time a sail whitened the waves Marie watched from her window through the curé's glasses—watched with unwinking eyes, while her heart beat heavily from terror and suspense.

But Charles and Achille did not arrive, and by the first of May the boats that had returned were more than those which lingered. A shadow crept into Marie's heart. She did not sing any more.

Père Legouffre, too, grew more silent and looked at her sadly when he thought she did not notice him, but neither spoke about what either feared.

Now but six boats remained, and one of these came drifting in with a single tattered sail, bearing news of a tempest!

That evening Marie wandered along the shore as she had not done since Achille's departure. She made her way to the cabin upon the cliff.

She hated the green grass and flowers,

## THE SEAL MAIDEN

remembering the snows through which she had climbed to him that night when she gave her heart into his keeping. The place looked desolate and strange, and inside the air was icy as death.

She knelt down by the door where they had knelt that night together, prayed, wept, and looked over the tumbling sea.

She prayed that he might return to her; that she might see him once more, even in death.

Suddenly old Mère Faguy's words stirred in her remembrance:

"Give back thy charm to the sea, or thou wilt never gain a lover."

She knew the island superstition, but it arose in her instinctively also, that age-long clamor of the human heart for sacrifice. She touched the locket on her throat.

In its thin golden shell lay all that she had dreamed of during those years of childhood, all her fond hopes that she had breathed to her lover.

Marie had seen the pitying glances of the island women. They drew back from her now as of old, but not through fear of her. No one believed that Charles and Achille would return.

He was foredestined to die as his father and grandfather had died, and Charles as Guillaume Robitaille. These were of the sea's clan, her destiny, and none could escape that which was foreordained. Unless one sacrificed—

She tore the locket from her throat and flung it far out into the lapping waves.

When she returned the curé was waiting up for her. He gazed on her compassionately; he feared to tell her what had to be told. He had grown to love her as a daughter.

"Marie, my child, the governor desires to speak with thee," he said.

"Tonight, father? How can I go to St. Pierre tonight?"

"He is here with me," Père Legouffre answered, and led her into his study.

Before a fire of logs stood M. Floquet, and with him were two gentlemen, one young, one old. The younger was a dapper Parisian, with a blond, upcurved mustache, who eyed her admiringly.

But when she looked at the other she felt the room begin to sway and held hard to the edge of the door. For this man, gray-haired, distinguished-looking, bearing himself as one should who wears the



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## A. MERRITT'S FANTASY

ribbon that edged his button-hole, was the man of the miniature.

M. Floquet saw her distress and approached her with sincere compassion.

"Sit down, *mademoiselle*," he said. "Look on this gentleman. Is this not he whose portrait you have worn ever since your birth? Did you not show it to me not many months ago?"

In truth, M. Floquet took great credit to himself for his discovery, of which the news would be bruited to the far corners of the world next day.

But he was also deeply touched—almost as much so as the gray-haired man, who came forward and spoke so tremulously.

"She has my wife's eyes," he said to the governor. "Oh, if it should be true, your excellency!"

"My child, show this gentleman your locket," said Père Legouffre.

"You see, *mademoiselle*," the governor interposed, we have reason to believe that this gentleman may be your father. He is "—he whispered a famous name—" and he longs for his only child. He will take you to Paris with him, and you shall be rich and have your heart's desire—servants to wait on you; you shall travel; you shall have to spend each year, just as you will, more money than is to be found upon all Miquelon."

Her heart's desire! Achille!

"Show *monsieur* your locket, my child," said Père Legouffre again.

Her hands went to her sun-bronzed throat. "I have no locket."

"But the locket that you have always worn—the one with the miniature," said Père Legouffre.

"I have no locket," said Marie. "It fell into the sea."

Père Legouffre recoiled; M. Floquet stared at her in dismay. This was incredible; this was contrary to all the rules of romance!

THE girl looked aimlessly from one to the other—at Père Legouffre, shaken to helplessness; at the governor's grotesque dismay; at the gray-haired man's sad face. A fearful battle was raging in her heart.

The old dream had come true, with all its longings but it did not hold Achille. The splendid future, the call of blood to blood, matched themselves madly against her heart's desire.

Presently the governor raised his eyes and began very slowly:

## THE SEAL MAIDEN

"But it was this gentleman's face within the locket, *mademoiselle*. I can almost swear to it. Come, do you not recognize him?"

She saw a little boat rocking on the green waves beside huge ice-floes, and Achille, sea-drenched, with that last look in his eyes.

"No, *monsieur*," she replied. "This gentleman resembles the picture, but my picture was not he."

The gray-haired man sank into a chair, and the little secretary seemed to bristle with annoyance.

"Marie," pleaded Père Legouffre, "you understand, do you not, that this is perhaps your father, who longs to claim his own? I, too, have seen the miniature, and while my eyes are old I feel sure—"

She knew now why they had not let her see Achille alone.

"I feel sure that you are mistaken, my dear child. Will you not try to call up the face in the miniature?"

"No, this gentleman is not the one in the picture," she said again with the same steadfast conviction.

She said it to the governor also, and to the gray-haired man, and then repeated it when they pleaded with her.



At last she broke away and went running down the road toward the shore, and the sky was bright as day with the north lights.

The sky was bright at midnight, lurid with gold and white that flashed and played from zenith to horizon. The black waves tumbled in white cascades over the sands. And out at sea was a shining sail that veered and turned and drove at last straight toward home.

But truer than the keel's sweep through the foam-flecked waves was that rush of spirit to spirit and love to love, and hearts and lips that met.

She looked at her lover and knew that the seal soul, the restlessness of the human heart, was dead at last. All life was here, in Achille's arms, on Miquelon.

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## THE SCIENCE OF TIME-TRAVEL

(Continued from page 115)

and shifts along the tube. An event has occurred. A new thing exists beside the old. Both lie there side by side, and the difference between their aspects is the Change. Also, it is movement.

**T**HE interval between these two is all that our poor human senses are able to perceive. We cannot see the things themselves, for we, like all else, are not static elements but interval-relationships in spacetime. And upon that basis we have built our conception of everything—being ourselves a part of this ceaseless change, like shadows to which every other shadow must seem a thing of substance!

I need not pursue further the analogy of the time-fluid. You can picture the building changing Universe, reborn every instant, extending itself infinitely along the tube of time. With widened imagination thus we can imagine time like the giant ribbon of a motion-picture film of infinite length. The whole story is there upon it.

And now we come to particularize. We come to me, to you. In each of us lives a spark of the original catalyst. For simple analogy again, let us suppose that each individual consciousness is endowed with a certain vibration rate, certain characteristics by which its energy is made manifest. And so there is only one portion of time—one tiny section of the tube with which that vibratory rate is compatible.

We are thus part of the great pattern; changed replicas of each of us are strewn side by side in time, for the lengths of our life-spans. Our senses enable us only to be aware of the intervals between our changes; and so it seems to us that we move forward in time; but upon that great record of time, all those myriad pictures of us are engraved in their progressive changes.

The scroll of time, engraved by something inconceivable to the human mind, laboring with all the wisdom, with gentleness, sternness and justice and an infinite love.

There is the conception. With it in mind, by any method of future science you may wish to devise, at once time-travel is pos-



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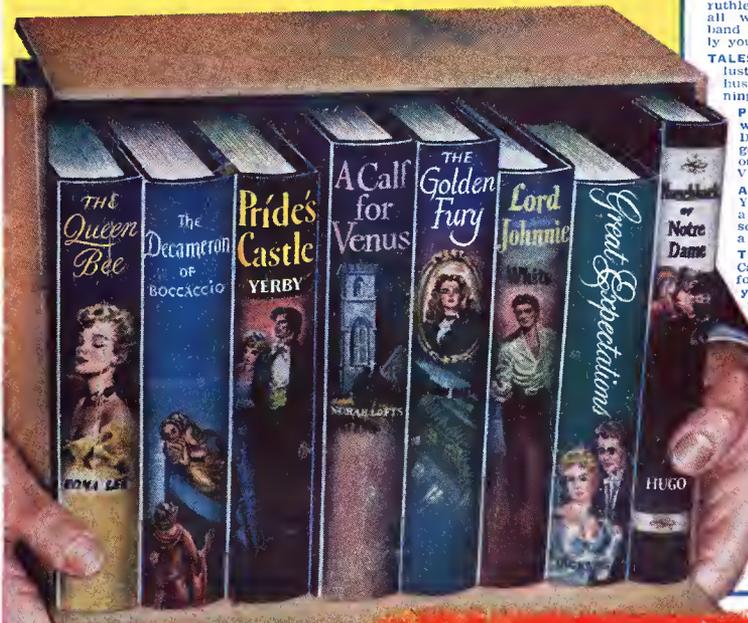
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